

“Faithfulness to Mission”

Homily of March 20, 2005

by Father Brian Timoney

Presidents ride to their inaugurations in armored limousines. Kings and queens ride to their coronations in gilded coaches. John Paul II has his “Popemobile.” Parade grand marshalls and festival queens ride on the backs of convertibles. Who rides on a donkey? Poor people in third world countries, or perhaps, children on a beach. The scene depicted today is almost ludicrous! But it is a scene set up by Jesus himself. He sent the disciples to find this donkey and he himself climbed on it and rode into the city. Now, since we can assume, I think, that he never did anything without some purpose, we are drawn to ask “Why?” Why this almost ridiculous spectacle? Indeed, we are drawn to ask beyond the why, as the crowds did, “Who is this?... Who is this?” And we find the answer in the passage from Phillippians that we just read a few minutes ago, when Paul says, “Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness, and found in human likeness, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” This, I believe, explains the donkey.

Who is this God in human form, who in his humanity did not aspire to be seen as God? He did not ride in on a chariot or mighty war horse. He rode in on a donkey. Indeed he embraced his humanity to the extent that, out of obedience, he embraced a terrible passion and death that he was to suffer and that we will meditate upon during this coming week. What was this obedience of his? To what or to whom was he obedient? The will of the Father, the will of God. And what was this will of God? It was that he, Jesus, reveal to the world a God of compassion, forgiveness and love, a god who cares about us and loves each one of us unconditionally. This was his purpose in life. This is what he was called to do. This was his mission. Everything that he said, everything that he did, pointed to such a God. And he would be obedient, faithful to that mission, even though he knew full well that it would create enemies for him, and inevitably lead to his death, as Paul said, “becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Now, as Christians, we are urged to strive to be like Christ, to follow in his footsteps, to live by his values. Though many of you may have very heavy crosses to carry, personal illness perhaps with great pain, death of a parent, a child, a spouse, a sibling, prolonged sickness of a loved one, family quarrels, separation, addictions, loss of a job..... You know your own cross, and it may be very, very heavy. But it is unlikely to reach to the level of the savage, excruciating death of Jesus. So, how can we be like Christ? How can we imitate him? We can, in our acceptance of our mission on earth and being faithful to it whatever the cost to ourselves. God’s will for us, our mission to glorify God by our lives, to live lives in faithfulness to our mission, the gospel ideals of forgiveness, reconciliation,

mercy, simplicity of life, concern for others and peace-making. This is our mission. This is our purpose. Let your light shine before all that seeing your good works, they may give glory to your Father in heaven.

This week we will be meditating on the Passion and the death and the Resurrection of Jesus, and this leads us to praise God for the possibility that has been given to us through this whole Easter mystery, the possibility given to us of living a full human life, a life that is pleasing to God and uplifting for our fellow human beings. We pray today that we may be faithful to this great purpose, to this great mission that has been given to us. Amen.