

Palm Sunday 20



In 1633, as the plague swept Europe, the villagers of Oberammergau prayed to God. They promised to perform the story of Jesus's Passion — his life, death and resurrection — every 10 years, if God spared them from the horrors of the disease. Since then, the people of Oberammergau, in what is now Germany, have largely kept up their end of the bargain. But, recently, the organizers of the play — which has a cast of some 2,500 and can feature 900 people onstage at once — announced they were canceling this year's Passion Play, because of the coronavirus pandemic. The first of the 103 daylong performances had been scheduled for May 16. The production will be delayed until 2022.

Ten years ago, I was truly blessed to fulfill a life-time ambition to travel to Bavaria to watch the play. I was privileged to have a seat only 3 rows back from the stage and to experience the events of what we now call 'Holy Week' almost as a bystander on the edge of the crowd. The tension and emotion in the audience was palpable. The power of the unfolding story made more real as members of the cast would have served us in the shops and restaurants of the little village earlier in the day. Ordinary people participating in a quite extra-ordinary act of thanksgiving and of gratitude.

How could we, who watched the play in 2010, possibly have known that just ten years later, the play would be postponed due to a plague (or, pandemic as we now would term it!) sweeping Europe and the world?



Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on his little donkey would have contrasted starkly to Pontius Pilates recent entry into the city at the head of his troops. And how starkly will the procession which followed Jesus through the streets that day contrast to the procession which would follow him to the cross. An abandoned figure. Abandoned even by his friends.

How easy to attach yourself to that first procession.

How hard to follow your master and friend to a painful death.

Jesus could have avoided coming to Jerusalem. He could have compromised. But his consuming passion for his mission does not allow him to side-step the Cross.

We have come to associate the word 'passion', in the context of Holy Week, as the suffering and death of Jesus on the Cross. We sometimes fail to remember that it was the force of Jesus' passionate love for us that drove him forward during his ministry. Jesus' passion for the 'little people' of his society; the abandon; the unloved. His passionate anger at the religious class of his day, forever putting barriers to those on the fringe. Jesus' passion on the cross truly demonstrates the lengths to which extravagant love did go, does go, for us. For you and me.!

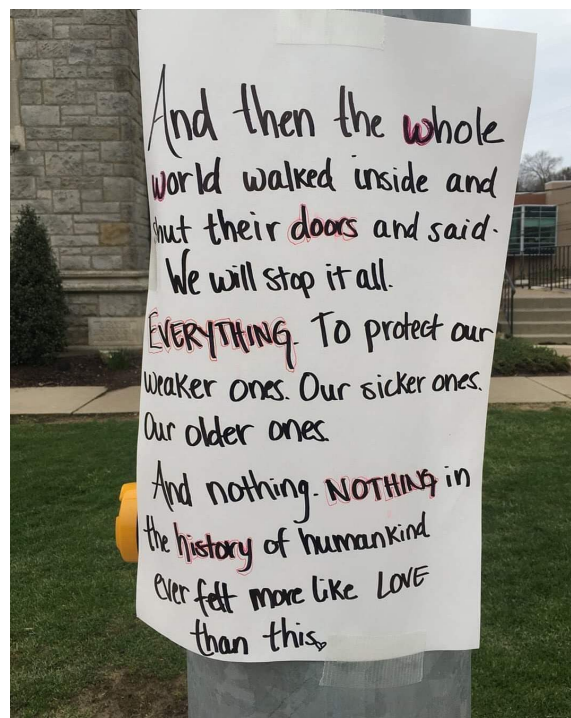
And what of us, as we, in our day, walk our own path through a pandemic? Once again, we are witnessing ordinary people acting in a most extraordinary manner. The heroes and heroines manning our NHS. All those faithfully turning up for work in the essential services. The army of volunteers, coming forward in unprecedented numbers to aid the weaker members of our society. Not to forget those who care for themselves – and

others – by self-isolating in their own homes. And caring for others through contact by ‘phone and social media. Countless others, serving society in countless ways. Yes, surprisingly as may be, there still **is** something called society. Demonstrating passionate love.

What will we do? How will we choose to commemorate, when, please God, the time comes to look back at these strange and difficult days? How will we use the experience of Coronavirus to tell others of the passionate love of God in sending his beloved son to us, his wayward Creation?

To leave you with two ways of communicating passionate love.

One discovered on Facebook 2020 –



And One written by John, the beloved disciple, who stood with the women at the Cross:

“For God loved the world in this way: so much that he would give up his Son, The Only One, so that everyone who trusts in him shall not be lost, but he shall have eternal life.” Jn 3: 16

Blessings to you all this Holy Week and Easter

Jane



ⁱ Taken from “Palm Sunday Reflections’, Father Dennis McBride C.Ss.R.