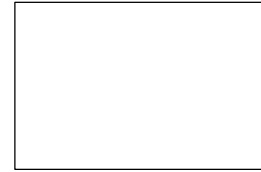


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PALM /PASSION SUNDAY
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MESSAGE FOR PALM /PASSION SUNDAY, 2009

In the city of London two parades happen. Leaders of governments and their entourages flow in by private, executive jet, are whisked away in luxury limos to prime suites in the priciest hotels. Security is absolute. An army of police are ready to confront and contain the expected protesters. This parade honours the greatest god in the world, the Market Place and the son of god, Greed.

The second procession arrives by any means they can. Giving of their own time and expense – staying with friends, relatives, billets, hotel rooms of a down-scale sort, tents – the cold, hard streets of London are their meeting space. They are an assemblage of non-government and not-for-profit organizations, pensioners, small towns, other recessionary victims and a few hooligans spoiling for a fight.

“Police clash with G20 protesters” “122 arrested in violent protests” scream the headlines. Little mention is made of 5000 peaceful, sometimes jovial, demonstrators in the streets. Nothing said of the cold, bloodless violence inflicted by the market collapse.

At the Royal Bank of Scotland a window is broken. A young woman enters and overturns a sacred computer, then races about wildly swinging that most lethal weapon, a keyboard, by its cable. She is promptly arrested. Later she confesses to having met beforehand with a few friends and to share some beer and chips.

Solemnly the G20 ends, an agreement, pre-negotiated to ensure success, announced. Photo-ops ensue, some with invisible prime ministers. The world is reassured that profit will be protected and, after a while, all will be well. The end. Is it?

2000 years ago two processions enter Jerusalem in anticipation of the Passover, a sacred feast for the Jewish people – a time of political unrest and demonstrations.

often violent, against the Roman occupiers. As is typical on such occasions, the army of Governor Pontius Pilate, usually stationed to protect him at his seaside resort, arrives to support the local legion. Entering with great fanfare and led by Pilate, they are resplendent in shining armor and polished weapons, groomed horses and magnificent chariots. They serve Augustus Caesar, the son of the god Julius, protector of an empire of greed and bringer of peace through sudden, violent suppression of any opposition.

The other procession is led by an unknown peasant from Galilee, seated on a borrowed donkey, followed by a motley crew of fishermen, tax collectors and assorted nobodies, hailed by children, outcasts and others bearing palm branches. Jesus is known as a wise teacher, a healer, a bringer of non-violent peace and promoter of the Kingdom of God, a realm based on mutual respect, community and dignity for all people.

In the days that follow, he overturns tables in the great Temple, wielding that most lethal weapon, a knotted cord, is later arrested while at prayer. Rumor has it that he had been sharing some wine and bread with his friends prior to the incident. He is dismissively hung on a cross to die for challenging the greed god of the empire of the day. The end. Is it?

You may hear others trying to blame the Jewish people, even Jewish today, for killing Jesus. This is simply not true. The Roman Empire executed him for challenging their god, their system and their values.

For Holy Week, this time between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday, let each of us reflect on greed—our own, the system and institution of greed that creates both wealth and poverty, how we participate in that system and what we can do about it in our own lives.

In George Bernard Shaw's play about her, St. Joan asks, "Must a Christ suffer in torment in every age for the sake of those who have no imagination?" and then, "O God that made this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to accept thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?"

Amen