

Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Palm Sunday)

Creative Passion

March 25, 2018

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We call God “almighty.” And we God’s act of creation as the epitome of his might. But if you think about it for God to create, he actually has to restrain his power, that something other than himself can emerge, evolve into being. For nothing can stand over against God’s boundless power unless God holds his own power in check.

Thus God’s act of creation is less an expression of God’s power than an act of God’s restraint. Or better put, God expresses his power by empowering others. Its not that God’s power is not operative at all. Without God’s power we would not exist at all. But God’s power holds that we might express our own power, whether than act is in accord with God’s power or not.

Its like raising a child. Parenting is as much an ascetic practice of self-restraint as it is of self-expression. To parent is to care for your child in a way that enables and teaches that child to learn how to express and care for themselves. Parental power is also about empowering another, that they might emerge and evolve into a person of their own. Parents can assert to much power over their child, They can be too protective, not allowing the child to learn from their own mistakes, they can be too smothering, preventing them from expressing themselves altogether.

Today we focus on the passion of Christ. We should see it not as a frustration of God’s power but the ultimate unspooling of the logic of God’s creation. Where the son of God surrenders his power to those God has empowered, handing himself over to our power altogether. For the Father did not crucify his Son, humanity did. In fact I am not sure it is quite accurate that the Father did not send his son to be crucified. The Father sent his son, and this is how humanity responded. Jesus was not the kind of Messiah people were looking for. The crowds were looking for a mighty King who would overthrow their oppressors, the Romans and their emperor. But Jesus refused that kind of Messiahship already when he was tempted by Satan after his baptism. The devil offered to make Jesus king of the world. He offered to work with Jesus rather than against him if he would be that kind of Messiah.

But that would have been a Satanic exercise of power. Like a parent who won't let their child be themselves, who sees in their child only a mirror of themselves. This apparent divine defeat, is thus really God's ultimate triumph. Today is a story not of love vanquished but love victorious.

If we are to follow Christ we too must use what power we have to empower others different from us as well. When Ignatius founded his religious order he did not want to name it after himself but after Jesus. Initially the Vatican resisted. It seemed presumptuous. Why not call your order the Ignatians, like Benedict's Benedictines, Dominic's Dominicans, Francis' Franciscans? But Ignatius was taken with the idea of companionship, of working alongside Jesus, and so he wanted to call his religious order the Companions of Jesus, the Jesuits for short.

Today we accompany Jesus in his final surrender of his power to the power of those arrayed against him. We do so in the recognition that this loving to the death is not a victory over love, but the ultimate logic of a love that thereby conquers death itself. Egyptian Christians would symbolize this by turning their traditional symbol for life, the ankh into a cross. And so we display Christ on the cross on the wall behind me, on our sacred books and sacred objects, and often enough on our person, around our neck or under our clothes, to testify to all and the remind ourselves that we have dedicated our own lives to accompany this way of death to our own power, to life in God's paradoxical almighty power.