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Passion Sunday

by Ed Hays

Like modern drugstores, ancient pharmacies offered prophylactic medicines for protection against diseases. For the Egyptians, green palm branches were prophylactic shields placed on top of mummies to protect the deceased in the next world and to ensure eternal life.

Miners used to carry small pieces of blessed palms in the shape of a cross as protection when they entered the dangerous bowels of the earth. Palm branches woven into crosses were placed in homes to ward off disease, pestilence, lightning, and demons. Farmers would place palm crosses in their fields to repel blights and ensure fertility. These and similar pious practices attribute almost magical powers to blessed palm branches which have long been considered signs of strength in adversity. Old legends hold that if a heavy weight is placed on top of a palm tree, it will stand tall. This explains why Nike, the Greek goddess of victory, was believed to have rewarded palm branches to the victors for remaining strong in great conflict.



As Jesus is greeted with palm branches today while riding up

into the Holy City, these famous lines from the poetry of Robert Frost could well be applied to him:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I ?

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

- *The Road Not Taken*

The choice of the road that Jesus would travel was confirmed in the olive garden of Gethsemane. In fact, it was three years earlier, at his baptism, when he first chose that road. His "less traveled road" was the Way traveled by those marked with the Tau, the cross of those already living in the New Reign of the Age of God. Faithful to that cross, Jesus lived centuries, if not millennia, ahead of his time, and so his life set him apart from others. Because Jesus was a living lesson, people called him "rabbi" (teacher) and to all who found his lesson intriguing, he said, "Come, follow me" (**Luke 18:22**) and invited them to become students of the Way.

That same invitation still thunders in the ears of all Jesus' disciples today. Indeed, it produces tremors of apprehension, if not outright fright, that the road less traveled will end on bloody Calvary! While tempted to bolt, however, do not detour onto that crowded "more traveled" road. Instead, remain faithful to Jesus as a good student during these days of Holy Week. By so doing, you will learn the art of healing your suffering, pains, fears of shame, and the greatest of all fears "the fear of the incurable Eden's epidemic: death!

In Gethsemane, Jesus reaffirmed the road that he would travel even though it would ultimately lead to his death. Today, boldly reaffirm your own baptismal decision to walk the road less traveled by tracing the Tau cross upon your forehead.

-- from *The Lenten Pharmacy* by Fr. Ed Hays

Prayer:



O Christ, as that giant stone rolled across your tomb to seal it shut,

you were swallowed up in a darkness that could not overcome
the bright star of your faith in God's promise.
Regardless of how dark our tomb nights are,
may that same brilliant star shine for each of us.

Each one of us will follow you into that dark abyss of death.
So grant us, O Lord, the grace not to be afraid
but to trust as you did.
Death's darkness frightens us, yet your loving surrender strengthens us.

Each burial evokes our conviction that God does not break promises.
So filled with hope, we remain kneeling at this somber tomb.

This week's mantra:

We praise you, O Christ,
and we follow you.

? prayer and mantra from *The Pilgrimage Way of the Cross* by Fr. Ed Hays

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