

Palm Sunday, Cycle A, April 9, 2017

Why did Jesus have to die?

We can answer that, as a human being, Jesus had to share in the fate common to all humanity. As the second reading of today's Mass, from the letter to the Philippians tells us,

“Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness.”

By choosing to become human, Jesus chose to die.

But, why did Jesus have to die this awful death on the cross? Why couldn't he have just died in bed, of old age, gently slipping off into a deep sleep? Why this awful death?

Our question echoes the question that Jesus himself asks on the cross:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

As a teacher, Jesus himself had fielded many difficult questions. His opponents were often trying to trip him up. They asked him about divorce, about paying taxes to Caesar, about performing a good deed on the Sabbath, all kinds of controversial issues. Jesus had often dealt with difficult questions. And now, it was his turn to ask a difficult question:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

This question of Jesus puts into words what so many people have felt throughout the ages. Think of the person who has just found out that they have come down with a chronic and debilitating illness. Think of the person who has just experienced the death of someone close to them.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

We hear this question coming from the cross. And, paradoxically, the cross itself supplies the answer. We look at the cross and see the silent answer to our questions. Through the suffering of Jesus, God tells us that we are not forsaken. God is suffering along with us, through Jesus.