

REFLECTION: LET'S CHEER THE WINNER!

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It was a very pleasant spring day. The Romans were going about their usual business, keeping an eye on us all and always ready with a gruff command with its implied threats of punishment. But it was still a pleasant spring day! There was something afoot that was offering a change of pace and even a bit of hope. The word was out that this fellow Jesus, straight-talking, good-humoured and seemingly frightened of no one, might well be the One we'd been waiting for so long.

Of course in these uncertain times you had to be a bit cautious when it came to pinning your hopes on new movements and people who popped up from left field. Still and all, there was a groundswell that felt like hope.

We went to see for ourselves as he rode into town and it was impossible not to get caught up with the mood of the crowd. "Hosanna", "Save Us" became the crowd's mantra. People laid palms in front of him as a mark of respect and there was a feeling of expectation that things might indeed change. His calm presence in the midst of all the excitement spoke of an authority that we had rarely if ever seen in others who claimed leadership here.

We heard stories about Jesus' care for those who lived beyond the boundaries of respectable society. There were whispers about his healing touch and reports of his story-telling which raised the ire of those who saw themselves as the guardians of orthodoxy.

Despite these tensions, he seemed to be on safe ground and we went to bed that night feeling we were on a winner!

It was too good to last! Within days, the wheels had come off and here is Jesus arrested, charged and sentenced to death. The people in power had their way and he was on his way to the Cross.

The crowds always love a winner. Those who had been cheering him just days before, now knowing that they were under the watchful eye of the authorities, changed their song from "Hosanna" to "Crucify him." It was clear he was not all they'd hoped, and any power they thought he had was replaced by a picture of abject, silent weakness.

How could we cheer such a pathetic figure? Sure, we'd changed our tune, but at least we were consistent in cheering for the winning team, whoever it was!

This all-too-human pattern is played out again and again through history. The winners take the spoils and the rest of us follow along or disappear from view.

In the Church we have played this game as well as anyone. All was well as long as we seemed to have our act together. People cheered and were happy to be counted among the crowd of supporters.

At different times in our history, the frailty of the Church becomes exposed as it has once again in our time. Many erstwhile supporters have not only left but joined in the chorus of ridicule and condemnation. "Crucify him" becomes again the fashionable mantra.

There were a few on that Good Friday who continued to journey with the humiliated, wounded Jesus. While not ignoring his wounded state, they managed to hold on to the truth they'd learned from him.

In our time, the wounds of the Church are indeed profound and deeply distressing. There is much still to be done by way of healing, reparation, justice and transformation. It's very understandable that these wounds are so painful that some can no longer see themselves as part of this broken body.

There are others who feel deep sadness and shame at a system that protected wrong-doers and failed to listen to victims. Somehow they still manage to see that there is more to this community than its broken parts. They stand at the foot of the Cross this Good Friday and ache for the day of Resurrection.

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