Passion Sunday – Cycle B

Isaiah 50: 4-7; Phil 2: 6-11; Mk 14: 1–15: 47

March 31/April 1, 2012

***Behold the Lamb of God! Behold him who takes away the sins of the world!*** Behold him on the mule riding into Jerusalem. Behold him sitting with his Apostles at the Last Supper. Behold him in the Garden of Gethsemane, and in the dungeon, at his scourging, on the way to Calvary. Behold him naked and nailed to a cross. Behold him in the tomb. Behold the only begotten Son of God, given for our redemption, sacrificed for our sins. Behold the wood of the cross on which hangs the Savior of the world!

My friends, what remained at the crucifixion? What do you see? A naked man nailed to a cross, stripped of any and all human dignity…. That is what we see which, if we rely on our sight alone we will either be filled with pity, or scorn, or fear, or discouragement and despair. But *faith comes not from sight but from hearing*, as St. Paul tells us. So, what remained at the crucifixion? What did you hear? “Father, forgiven them. Father, why have you abandoned me? Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

Yes, we hear that he remained God’s Son. He was stripped of all else, except his divine sonship.

A couple of weeks ago, I made a pilgrimage to a holy place, to the island of Molokai in Hawaii. There is a peninsula there called Kalaupapa, hidden away and accessible only by plane or by mule. Not everyone can go there, for access is limited by state law. It was on Kalaupapa that live the remaining few lepers of Hawaii, men and women who suffer from Hansen’s disease. This is the place where in the 1860s, a young Belgian Sacred Heart priest, St. Damien, came to serve the spiritual and physical needs of the people there.

These people, regardless of what station in life they once enjoyed, once they were diagnosed with leprosy they were forced onto a ship which took them to a small bay where they were thrown overboard, along with their belongings. They would swim for their lives, and once reaching shore they would be stripped of everything eventually, for leprosy left them with nothing, and as the months and years passed they would lose their appearance, their toes and feet, their fingers and hands, their ears and nose. In the end they would be stripped of everything but one: their dignity as sons and daughters of God.

This is what St. Damien of Molokai continually reminded them. Over and over again he showed them by word and deed that they were beloved sons and daughters of God, no matter what. They were God’s children. St. Damien identified with them; he became one of them.

In their passion, in their crucifixion, what remained in the end, what could never be taken from them was their dignity as sons and daughters of God.

My friends, we too are sons and daughters of God, if we have been baptized. In the Passion of Jesus we can come to recognize ourselves; we can come to know who we became in our baptism. We too in baptism were stripped of everything and given the dignity of being a child of God. This can never be taken from us. As our lives progress, we too will eventually be stripped of all in the end. We will either willingly let go of it, or it will be taken from us, all the trappings of the world. We will be stripped of everything, save one thing: our dignity as sons and daughters of God. If we are faithful to God, what will remain in the end is our attachment to the Father.

God’s love, the love of a Father for his children a love, as Pope John Paul the First reminded us, that is similar to a love of a mother for her children… this love will never leave us.

God will love us in the end.

Behold the Lamb of God.

Behold the Son of God.

Behold in him face of the Father’s love.