

"Not as a mere spectator did he look upon his fellow-Israelites, but as a brother he looked upon them and wept, saying, 'Woe is me! Would that I might die for you.'"

That sentence which we read from the ancient Michalsh last Thursday night has so many meanings in this week of Passion in our nation's life - and this week of Passion in the Church's memory. That one hardly knows where to begin.

It was <sup>written</sup> ~~written~~ originally about Christ, but it seems just as appropriate for ~~the~~ <sup>our</sup> ~~one~~ whose patriot Christians have always seen taking shape in those ~~words~~ <sup>words</sup> Psalm about a Suffering Servant:

He was despised and rejected of men,  
a man of sorrows and acquainted  
with grief.  
Surely he has borne our griefs and  
carried our sorrows,  
yet we esteemed him smitten by  
God and afflicted.  
But he was wounded for our  
transgressions,  
he was bruised for our iniquities.  
Upon him was the chastisement that  
made us whole, ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> with his ~~stripes~~ <sup>stripes</sup> we are healed.

The psalm gave no name to that mysterious figure -- but the Church has always known it to be the Christ. For it is the Name.

Once in New York I visited an exhibit of illuminated pages from a famous 13th Century Prayer Book.

One of the illustrations showed God The Father sitting on his throne in heaven, from where he had just hurled his Sanctus Spiritus toward the earth.

- And you see the Sanctus Spiritus coming down for his Incarnation -- his arms outstretched as they will be later on the Cross.

\* GOD ENTERS OUR EXISTENCE IN ORDER TO DIE!!

! But paradoxically The God who lives -- is This God who dies!

+ The God who is really dead is the God who imposes his life upon men --

= The God who breaks into his world with raw power --

= The God who coerces --

= The God who acts arbitrarily and capriciously in nature and history --

= The God who shouts to make himself heard --

= The God who rules with an iron hand --

\* THAT GOD IS DEAD!

\* Free men will never fall down to worship him again!

+ But The God who lives is the God who

= refuses to overpower us --

= The God who makes himself vulnerable to men --

= The God who keeps "hands off" his world except to serve it and to suffer with it and for it --

= The God who has our freedom even when it literally kills him to do so

= The God who, in Isaiah's words, lets himself be "oppressed and afflicted" -- but never opens his mouth.

\* THIS IS THE LIVING GOD!!

\* And there's some chance, even in our day, that men in their freedom will worship him.

It's important for us to announce this, I believe, in this generation which, in spite of all its well publicized affluence and technological progress has seen as much and maybe more mass agony than any generation in history.

! Certain names have become symbols for it:

Dachau .. Buchenwald .. Hiroshima ..

Korea .. Vietnam .. Watts .. Newark

.. Detroit .. and now, after this last week, the new ones to be added to the roll?

+ They are the ones that the world will be made of in the summer

What this means is <sup>simply</sup> that we live in a scarred world.

And a scarred world is no place for an unscarred God.

+ But whatever else He may be, our God is not unscarred.

The other gods were strong,  
But you were weak.

They roared, but you  
stumbled to a throne.

But to our wounds, only  
God's wounds can heal,

And not a god has wounds  
save you alone. \*

It would be a mistake, however, as the tense of these last lines suggests, to think of The Cross as only an event done there in history -- or a piece of art up here in the altar.

THE CROSS IS A REALITY OUT THERE --  
IN THE WORLD!

: The "Suffering Servant" walks the earth today -- in strange disguises.

+ He walks the earth, for example, wherever in this world people hurt.

- He was in agony this winter in the ghettos where children turned blue in heartless tenements and screamed from the bites of rats.

- He was in agony last night in Vietnam where men <sup>could</sup> ~~and~~ while peace is ~~still~~ only a hope.

- He's in agony in Atlanta where a family must now face the void left by a martyred father.

- As much to the point, He may be in agony among us where some member of the community fights a lone battle with himself.

\* ALL THIS IS SIMPLY ONE OF THE COSTS TO GOD OF BEING GOD -- That He

can't stop this world and get off -- anymore than with a snap of the finger He can make the world gain vanish.

+ We know from seeing how Jesus walked the earth that God has condemned himself forever to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows.

But there's a second disguise in which the "Suffering Servant" walks the earth.

: You meet him wherever one person offers to take upon himself one small part of the world's accumulation of misery -- consents to be wounded for society's transgressions -- agrees to put his body in the line for others.

+ This is why we saw the cross forming right before our eyes when the news came in last Thursday night.

- Those of us who had gathered for the Seder had just read those words meant for Moses but right also for this latter day leader of the people martyred of a people in oppression.

"Not as a mere spectator did he look upon them (people), but as a brother he looked upon them and wept saying, 'Woe is me! Would that I might die for you.'"

+ and he did... and

a nation mourned... but the best will come when tears of grief must be translated into deeds of mercy rather

So it's really

what's more to the point is to ask whether the "Suffering Servant" can even <sup>wear</sup> the disguise of people like ourselves -- The respectable ones -- Those of us who know much more about the sweet taste of success and privilege than the bitter gall of defeat and denial.

+ Speaking for myself, I must confess that too much of the time my own participation in the world's suffering is about at the level reflected in this sign which appeared some time ago at the Princeton campus:

PEACE PARADE

11:30 SATURDAY

NASSAU HALL

BRING DATES

PICNIC LUNCH

THRU BY KICKOFF

+ The fact is that people like ourselves are the toughest nuts God has to crack.

- Who wants a cross... if he can avoid it?

- And the point is, most of us can.

\* That's one of the costs to us of being over-privileged.

# Our relative excess of almost everything forms a barrier that filters out the sound of the world's pain.

# It's only at rare intervals that we have "ears to hear."

# But God hears!

And this is the good news ~~which~~ Holy Week announces to us year after year.

: We know he hears because we watch again the Passion of One whose "appearance was so marred" that men could hardly stand to look at him.

+ They turned their faces away -- rather than face the truth he revealed about themselves.

+ And we can always turn ours away, too, if we choose.

+ Or we can keep his Passion -- by receiving again its benefit of forgiveness and life as we will today --

and then by letting that marked man drag us against all our resistances to be present with those who suffer -- "not as mere spectators" -- but as brothers, <sup>thus</sup> entering somehow, concretely into the "fellowship of his suffering".