

**HOMILY: Deacon Mike Jones**

**March 15-16, 2008**

**Dorothy Day, a committed pacifist even during World War II, when asked what Pope Pius XII could possibly have done regarding Hitler and the Jews, reportedly answered, “He could have ridden into Berlin on a donkey.”**

**Day was invoking the nonviolent Jesus on the first day of the rest of his short life. By all accounts, Jesus’ Quixotic decision to ride into Jerusalem on an ass in fulfillment of a well-known messianic prophecy sealed his fate with the religious leadership and the Roman occupation. He was poking Pontius Pilate in the eye and challenging the Sanhedrin.**

**When Jesus then symbolically “cleansed” the temple, he was exposing the nerve of complicity between church and state, with both lining their pockets from the temple taxes and profits from animal sales. Jesus thus incurred the full wrath of both. He might as well have been the pope taking on the Nazi regime in 1943 by riding into Berlin on a donkey.**

**What are we to make of this moment when Jesus provokes his own death by confronting the temple establishment and the Roman Empire? Matthew’s Gospel is forced to probe the deep paradox and the hidden meaning of God’s will for Jesus on the cross.**

**As the one Gospel that focuses most often on fulfillment texts from the Hebrew Scriptures, Matthew presents Jesus as scripted at every step by the psalms, the prophets and the writings that portray God’s messiah as a suffering servant. After the crucifixion, we delve into the scriptures and find no surprise that Jesus was struck down as he spoke truth to power. It was God’s way of exposing and overcoming the forces of evil with the secret power of love. Resurrection will confirm it—truth and love always prevail. Regimes fall, principalities and powers spend their fury and collapse upon themselves, but selfless love lives on, advancing God’s ultimate plan for history. God’s truth lives on, dispelling fear, inspiring service, transforming the world.**

**Facing the might of the British Empire in his campaign for Indian independence, Gandhi told his fearful colleagues, “When I despair, I am reminded that through all of history, the way of truth and love has always won. Whenever you are in doubt that this is God’s way, think of that.”**

**El Salvador’s Monsignor Oscar Romero was converted from a bookish, cautious centrist to a fearless advocate of the poor in their struggle for justice. He knew he was inviting his own death when he mounted the pulpit at the Metropolitan Cathedral for the last time in March of 1980 and called upon the army to stop the repression. His assassination gave precious substance to the promise of the Latin American bishops at Medellin, Puebla and Santo Domingo to commit the church to God’s “preferential love for the poor.”**

**How are we to understand our own call to follow Jesus on this Palm/Passion Sunday? The logic of self-preservation tells us to resist the story we will hear today and in the days to come. Do not let it move you. Do not let it bring you to the same threshold Jesus chose, where your own cautious life might be exchanged for the chance to give yourself for love.**

**Won’t it hurt terribly, cost dearly and leave me empty of myself? Come and see. Don’t be afraid. Welcome to Holy Week.**