

## Palm Sunday

David F. Schwartze was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph 25 years ago this week. At his silver jubilee, a priest is usually feted by family and friends, and by the people he has served.

There won't be a major celebration this week for David's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. He died 3 weeks before his first anniversary.

David grew up in St. Elizabeth's Parish, where his parents still live. Inspired by his pastor, Msgr. Richard Shumaker, David entered the seminary in the class just behind mine. After college, he studied theology in Rome. During his third year there, he was diagnosed with lymphoma. I got this improbable news on Valentine's Day, 1979, while serving as a deacon at St. Mark's Parish in Independence.

David came home for treatment, and Bishop John Sullivan ordained him a deacon, a ministry he exercised at my first mass that spring. As a new priest, I went to St. Elizabeth's, where David was helping out as a new deacon. "Between the two of us," he said to me, "we ought to make one good priest."

A year later, Bishop Sullivan knew that David's illness had progressed, but he believed that David was fit for priesthood. David was devout at prayer, a good student, a friend to people of all ages, a born leader, and an insightful analyzer of the human spirit - all wrapped up in a slightly paunchy frame that kept him from taking himself too seriously. The bishop did not wait until the end of the academic year. He believed the time to put David into service was sooner, not later, sick or not. He ordained David on March 22, 1980, and he assigned the new priest to St. Therese Parkville, where his tenacity helped others face their own trials with courage.

David's death was the first I ever witnessed. With his family gathered at his bedside, this mournful priest led a few prayers. A few days later David was buried next to Msgr. Shumaker. Afterwards, I felt that in spite of the drama of the previous two years, death was not something that David took passively. It seemed like he was in command - that dying was something he had done, an announcement he had made, a belief he had professed in the timeless mystery of a loving God.

This weekend we commemorate the death of Jesus in our liturgies of Palm Sunday. Sunday's excerpt from the Letter to the Philippians (2:6-11) announces the death and exaltation of Jesus, a mystery we enter in slow motion this holy week.

This passage has the form of a hymn, and several hymns today are based on it, including "Let All Together Praise Our God," "At the Name of Jesus," "Jesus, the Lord," and "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name." Even "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" alludes to this text in its famous words, "Mild he lays his

glory by." Paul probably took a popular hymn text and inserted it into his letter to the Philippians.

But why? Paul wrote this letter from prison according to 1:7. And Acts 16:25 says that Paul and Silas sang hymns while they were in prison at Philippi. Who knows? Maybe this was one of the songs Paul sang behind bars.

He quotes it for the Philippians because he is trying to preserve their unity. The early church was threatening to splinter, and Paul could not hold it together on his own. He urges upon his readers the same attitude that Jesus had. Jesus "was in the form of God," but he "did not regard equality with God something to be grasped." Rather, he laid his glory by. He took on the form of a slave by becoming human, and humbled himself all the way to accepting death, which God should not have to do, and an ignominious death at that - on a cross. Paul hopes that the church dividing beyond his prison bars will stay united through the virtue of humility.

We will hear phrases of this passage throughout Holy Week. As they recall the suffering and glory of Christ, they beg us to stay united in humility under the lordship of Christ.

We all undergo trials - the betrayal of friends, the failure of our efforts with the people we love, and the news of a terminal illness. You may think that the cross you carry has no purpose. But it can. It can lead to inspiration and glory. Just ask the people who knew David Schwartze.