

**Monsignor Dennis Sheehan**  
**Homily Given on March 28, 2010**  
**Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion – Liturgical Year C**

Good leaders make a huge difference. When leaders are effective, everyone benefits. But it honestly seems today that really good, effective leadership is thin on the ground. Political leaders seem to yell, threaten, or stall. Church leaders seem silent or out of touch. I'm going to suggest today that we learn something about leadership in a seemingly unexpected place. Turn with me to the cross of Jesus.

In St. Luke's story of the Passion, Jesus speaks three times. Each of his three brief sentences is leadership finding a voice.

Jesus has been betrayed, falsely accused, left on the cross to die a death of shame in slow torture. In similar cases, people cry out in defiant curses. Jesus takes another road. From the height of the cross, he forgives those who mock, shame, and kill: "Father," he prays, "forgive them. They don't know what they do."

Why forgiveness? Because Jesus sees that no heart is so cruel, no action so evil, that a human soul cannot be changed, moved, saved! Even here, Jesus sees beyond these miserable tormentors to what they could be by God's forgiving touch.

Jesus is crucified with two criminals. One rails and curses. The other recognized something in Jesus, confessing his innocence: "Jesus, remember me," he asks. Jesus is not a tidy bureaucrat. Jesus is a leader. He seizes the moment, takes the dying man at his word. "Today you will be with me in paradise."

Nearing his end, Jesus speaks a third phrase: "Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit." In the midst of chaos, in the midst of betrayal, Jesus keeps his eye on the center, keeps his eye on God his Father.

Lots of people take a crack at being a leader. Lots of books are written on how to lead. But what we learn from the cross is different, challenging and important.

- "Father, forgive them." Seeing people not as they are but as they could be.
- "Today, you are with me in Paradise." Seizing the moment. Recognizing that people are always better than their worst deeds.
- "Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit." Leadership keeps its focus, keeps its eye on the center, keeps its eye on God.

This kind of leadership probably does not make you popular. It may not win you a promotion. But eventually – maybe in three days – it will bring you resurrection!