

"DESIRE AND SENSE"

April, 1969

Pitirim A. Sorokin some 20 years ago predicted that the mood of Western society was edging toward what he called "sensate culture." What he meant was that two criteria would dominate all others in a man's motivation. The one is "desire" and the other is "sense, or feeling impression": what I want and what I like. As long as these two criteria are satisfied almost all uncomfortable questions that might tend to slowdown or inhibit are brushed aside.

But the fact is that neither man nor society can drift completely to the side of the immediate sensual criteria as an ethical guide and stay there for long. Ironically an odd kind of boredom inevitably sets in to harass any man who lives under the dominion of desire.

This is Holy Week. Jesus Christ had clearly fascinated the people by his anti-establishment Palm Sunday demonstration; the defiant entry into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. But our Lord does not build upon that popular affection of an afternoon. Jesus goes deeper into the very core of the social order and the individual human crises. Jesus claims the whole man and therefore he chooses the way of Good Friday with its terror and death, the same death that haunts all men. Therefore he takes upon himself what is deepest in man, our failures and our shattered hopes; this is the meaning of the cross. Three days later our Lord conquered death and in that victory we gain the vindication of his promises and of our existence.

In a certain sense it is probably necessary for our generation to make its swing through the "sensate" side of the street if only to discover that our own immediate desires have a short endurance capability, they wear out and the heroes they choose wear out as well. Jesus Christ will hold the crowd on Palm Sunday as long as he is clever but after the loneliness of Friday and the concrete event of Easter everything is different.