

22 Passion Sunday                      Year A                      April 5, 2020  
Isaiah 50:4-7                      Psalm 22                      Philippians 2:6-11                      Matthew 26:14-26:66

Passion Sunday commemorates the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Acclaimed as king by the cheering crowd, Jesus arrives at the fulfilment of His earthly mission. For Christ, it is the beginning of the last week of His earthy life, a week of violent suffering and death. The palms the people are waving will soon be formed into crosses and the people's cheers will turn into jeers calling for His death.

And secondly, we recall Jesus' passion and death. God is inviting us to do more than simply be bystanders. God invites us to join His Son, Jesus, on the road to Calvary and peer into His heart of love for each of us at each step along the way.

From the very beginning of his Passion narrative, St. Matthew draws the battle lines that will usher Jesus into His hour of suffering and glory. For Matthew, Jesus' passion is the ultimate confrontation between the Son of God and the forces of evil. Just before entering the battle, Jesus shares a final meal with His Apostles. Gathered at the Last Supper with His Apostles, Jesus outlines, both in Word and Sacrament, how they should live in His new Catholic Church that He has established.

Matthew records Jesus telling His Apostles, *"I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover meal with you before I suffer."* Then, when Jesus celebrates the first Holy Eucharist with them, He says, *"This is My Body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me . . . This cup that is poured out for you is the New Covenant in My Blood."* The Greek word *"remembrance"* means to enter into. We are each being invited to enter into Christ's sacrifice in which He offers us His Body to eat and His Blood to drink.

After the meal, His Apostles follow Jesus to the Mount of Olives. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus is deeply troubled, and He sweats blood as He prays to His Father to remove the chalice of suffering and death from Him. Then Jesus is betrayed by Judas and taken prisoner. He is mocked, blindfolded, beaten and spat upon. Jesus undergoes another suffering when Peter denies Him three times and the rest of the Apostles abandon Him. Perhaps ask yourself whether you have also abandoned Jesus and left Him there by Himself. Who do you see yourself as in this scene?

In the midst of the affliction and suffering of Jesus, it is much easier to find a distraction, to harden our hearts, to close our ears when listening to the Passion story,

to let our minds wander as we listen to the horrors of the story, to escape, to be indifferent.

On the Hill of the Skull the next day, Friday, Jesus is crucified between two thieves and dies as a common criminal. His mother, Mary and John and Mary Magdalene stand alone at the foot of the Cross, faithful to the last. No matter where Jesus looks, there is no comfort to be found, no assurance that the torment of His Body is doing anyone any good. Yet Jesus is convinced His Father has led Him to the cross, and so He submits to it, trusting in His Father with every laboured breath He takes.

St. Matthew ends his Passion story of Jesus by telling us about a Roman Centurion who, seeing what had taken place, praises God and says, "*Truly this Man was God's Son!*" The crowds who had gathered to watch Jesus be crucified returned home beating their breasts in repentance.

During this most solemn week of the Church year, we are invited to walk the road of suffering and death with Mary and those few friends who follow Christ to Calvary, and to stand there silently by His side. Jesus wants the work of His Cross to touch our lives and to break our sinful ways so that we may be changed and know God in a more meaningful way.

The sufferings of Christ, which we recall in a special way during Holy Week, have been a source of strength and renewal of faith to countless people throughout the ages. Jesus' Passion gives us a glimpse into the mystery of suffering that surrounds us on all sides. In times of trials, suffering and mental torture, often what keeps people going and gives them strength, hope, and inspiration, is the knowledge that they are at one with Jesus who also greatly suffered.

This final week of Lent offers us an opportunity to bring our hearts and minds into harmony with Christ. Whenever possible, everyone is invited to make a special effort to attend the Church Triduum, that is Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Saturday Easter Vigil, which dramatize the last agonizing moments of our Blessed Saviour's life.

These three days of Holy Week, which are called the Paschal Week are called the Paschal Triduum and they are very special in our Catholic faith. Let it be a time of prayer and a time of reflection on Jesus' Paschal mystery, drawing our hearts more closely to Jesus.

No one can follow Jesus through the Liturgy of Holy Week without the truth dawning anew in our hearts. The truth is that God loves us all with a love that cost His Son's death on the Cross. The climax of God's love for us will be celebrated on Easter Sunday, the day of Christ's Resurrection from the dead.

As we take our blessed palms home today, whatever we do with them, braid them into a cross or place them behind a religious picture or crucifix on the wall, or beside a statue, let them remind us all year long of how we can fail our Lord like those people of Jerusalem did so long ago, and how we all need the grace and the power from His Passion to stay faithful and loyal to the teachings of Christ. The drama of Passion Sunday is not only about an event of 2000 years ago, it is also our drama today, the drama of our faith and life.

May this Holy Week be a special time of grace and prayerful thanksgiving as we recall our redemption through Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and His glorious resurrection on Easter Sunday.