

Passion/Palm Sunday – April 4-5, 2020

Homily after the Gospel at the Process - Matthew 21:1-11

As Jesus returns to Jerusalem for the last time, he asks his disciples to bring him a donkey on which he will ride into the city.

Matthew comments on this manner in which Jesus has chosen to enter the city saying that this was to fulfill the prophecy spoken through the prophet Zechariah: “Say to daughter Zion, “Behold, your king comes to you, meek and riding on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.”

We all love to be in control and exercise our power, but we struggle to acknowledge the authority of others over us, even the authority of God over us. Remember the rebellion of Adam and Eve the trouble it brought to all humanity. Look at the many resisting the directives of our government leaders asking us just to make some sacrifices for the common good and protection of the lives of others.

God knows this about us. Jesus knows this about us. So, as always, he does not force himself upon us. Rather, he comes humbly to us and always respects our free will.

In the Gospel reading from Friday of this past week, when some of the Jews pick up rocks to stone him for what they think is blasphemy, Jesus tries to reason with them from Scripture, but then says simply, “Even if you do not believe me, believe the works that I do, so that you may realize that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” They still tried to arrest him.

However, today in the Gospel when the people of the city ask who Jesus is, the crowds with Jesus reply, “**This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.**”

They have seen and heard about the works of Jesus. They have heard or heard about his teaching. No one before ever did such things as Jesus has done. No one before has spoken or taught as he has done. Let us take some time this week ourselves to read or remember and think about all that Jesus has said and done, and then let our hearts tell us who he is for us and what we are ready to say to others about him. Let us go in peace, walking with Jesus as he journeys through Holy Week.

Homily after the Reading of the Passion

Today's readings are difficult to listen to as they speak about our human rejection of God and His presence among us in the person of Jesus. This rejection of God occurs in different degrees from a lack of compassion for Jesus in his human suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, to lack of trust in God by Judas, to betrayal by Peter, all the way to putting Jesus to death by crucifixion to try and push him and his teaching completely out of our life.

We all have experienced some rejections or put-downs or bullying in our life, but surely what we have experienced is nothing compared to the complete rejection Jesus experienced as God trying only to help us and do good for us. No wonder he cried out on the cross – “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” Yet, without resistance to the Father's will, he accepts this rejection all the way to its end in his death. Only God can totally absorb such rejection from us and yet love us unconditionally.

The Gospel of the Passion is the conclusion to the story of human resistance and rejection of God in which we have all participated. Amazingly, Jesus all along in his ministry sees this end coming yet, trusting in God, allows it to happen. – “The Son of Man indeed, goes as it is written of him,” he says.

Amazing too, is to see not only his love for the Father, but also his loving desire for union with us that we see his celebration of the Eucharist with his disciples (and now with us) and his confidence and looking forward to the celebration of this communion with him forever in the life to come. --“From now on I shall not drink this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it with you new in the kingdom of my Father.” What amazing love, that in spite of our rejections and failings he still promises to remain with us in this life. “After I am raised up I shall go before you to Galilee.”

Year after year, we walk with Jesus through these days of Lent and Holy Week and yet every year we need renewal in our faith as we, like those in Jesus' trial who gave false testimony, fall into misinterpreting our laws and religion to justify doing things our way instead of doing God's will.

Sometimes we courageously pull our swords and guns to defend ourselves or our faith, but then we learn that ultimately we are not to kill our enemies but to love them and convert them. It is truly difficult to believe in the power of love to overcome evil. In

the end, Jesus remains silent and makes no further effort to convince us other than to leave us the witness of his suffering, death and resurrection.

At times we, like Peter, and even Judas, come to see and regret the wrongs we have done, but often do not see that God forgives us and still wants to reconnect with us. – If you find these days challenging your faith – know that you are not alone and that it is okay to share your struggles with others. Let us reflect together on how God is using this time to bring eternal good to us and to our world.

Sometimes we say that God is hard to see and understand, yet the truth is right in our mouths as it was in the mouth of Pilate. -- “Are you the king of the Jews?” But we are blind and closed to the deeper meaning and truth of these words. We let ourselves be deceived into thinking we are doing something good by releasing Barabbas instead of Jesus. And at times we do not even follow logic or science in our rejection of him. When Pilate asks the crowd -- what evil Jesus has done? – they only shout louder, “Let him be crucified!” So much in error, yet so self-confident some even say “Let his blood be upon us and our children.”

But, to me the saddest sin or error is that of those being crucified and suffering with him who also join in the mocking him. The book of Revelation speaks of people suffering terribly from the plagues of the end times and yet the people did not turn back to God but condemned him instead. – What is happening today in the suffering of our world? Do we see God with us, or do we see God being against us?

Meanwhile, Jesus is faithful to end, giving everything of himself over to the Father in love for Him and in love for us. And already there is an earthquake -- some came forth from their tombs -- the curtain of the temple was torn in two – the soldiers watching his death proclaim – “Truly this man was the Son of God. They even put out soldiers to guard his dead body in the tomb ---but this great love and mercy and its power cannot be held down by our rejection and putting of Jesus to death.

We look forward to hearing the rest of the story – the good news of Easter -- next Sunday. Carrying our own crosses in our life and this time, we celebrate now a foretaste of the eternal banquet of heaven that we look forward to after our own death and resurrection with Christ.