

**“Repeating the Pattern of Salvation in Our Lives”**  
**Homily for Palm Sunday**  
**April 5, 2020; St. Mary’s Cathedral**

**Introduction**

Our days of Lent now reach their culmination with Holy Week, which we begin today. This year, of course, we celebrate these sacred mysteries in a completely unprecedented and unusual way. As always, we begin with the twofold movement of Palm Sunday: the commemoration of our Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and the account of his Passion and death.

Although we are very saddened that we cannot be physically present to each other, the spiritual meaning of our liturgy today remains the same: opening our hearts for the Lord to come in triumph into our lives, and the reminder that at times and in ways we, too, have crucified him – yes, we have crucified him by our sins.

**The Double Movement of Our Salvation**

In the account of St. Matthew’s Passion which we just heard proclaimed, Pilate asks the crowd, “Then what then shall I do with Jesus called Christ?” In response they shout out, “Let him be crucified!” They even repeat it, shouting even louder, “Let him be crucified!” Does it not cause us to flinch, to shutter, to hear such words shouted against our beloved Savior? And yet, this is what he endured for all of us.

The movement of our eternal salvation that is expressed in the liturgical drama that unfolds throughout Holy Week is reflected in what we heard in St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians in our second reading.

It begins with a downward movement: Christ descending from heaven, emptying himself to take the form of a slave – that is, taking on our weak human flesh – and then lowering himself all the way by submitting himself to an unjust death, the most despicable death possible, being buried in a tomb, and descending into hell, the realm of the dead. And then the movement back upwards: breaking out of hell with redeemed humanity, emerging from the tomb in rising from the dead, and returning to his Father in his Ascension back into heaven, where he is enthroned in glory for all eternity. It is a journey from suffering to glory, from defeat to triumph, from death to life, from Good Friday to Easter Sunday.

**The Pattern Repeated in the Life of the Believer**

In these days our community, our country, indeed the whole world, is gripped in an extended Good Friday. With the glory of Easter soon upon us that is a cause of such joy for us, we also continue a Lenten-type discipline, as we are restrained from the normal social interactions that define our day-to-day life. The absence of that social interaction causes us sadness and suffering, but gives us the opportunity to accept this and live it out in the true Christian spirit: keeping our eyes fixed on the goal.

In the immediate temporal realm, that goal is putting an end to this pandemic; that is the goal for which we discipline ourselves. But this can serve for us as a metaphor of the whole point of the Christian life in this world: to discipline ourselves to reach our ultimate goal, the life of heaven, where we will share Christ’s glory for all eternity. Lent is meant to be a lesson to us of how to live our lives all throughout the year, every year. God is giving us the opportunity this

year to learn this lesson even better, by, in a sense, extending Lenten-type discipline even beyond Lent into the season of Easter.

The pattern of God's plan for our salvation, a pattern repeated throughout Scripture and enfolded in the salvation won for us by our Savior, is the pattern for every Christian believer. Our salvation consists in accepting this gift of God and repeating it in our lives. God gives us ample opportunities to show our love for Him and our desire for salvation in the current circumstances in which we are living: adhering to the safety measures being issued by our government leaders; showing gratitude and kindness to those who provide essential services, sometimes even at risk to their own health; showing patience toward those who might be angry or rude because of the tension they may be experiencing at this time; showing neighborliness to those who are in special need, going out of our way to be of assistance to them; showing patience, humility, and generosity toward those of our own household, and taking advantage of this opportunity to share time with each other, especially through family prayer.

### **Conclusion**

It is precisely by such acts of Christian charity that we open our hearts to welcome Christ in triumph. Palm Sunday is also Passion Sunday: it begins with triumphal entry, but ends in a painful death. But this is the beginning of Holy Week, which leads to Easter Sunday, the real end of the story: victory over suffering and death.

What truly causes us sadness is that by our sins we have crucified him. But we have even greater gratitude and hope, because he has saved us, he himself has paid the price for our sins. Let us, then, open our hearts for him to enter in in glory by living the virtues of Christian charity, so that he may cast out for us the darkness of sin and sadness, and enlighten and heal us with the light of his saving love.