

Fr. Ed

Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday – Year A

Homily/Reflection

What was Jesus thinking? Have you ever wondered that? I have. When people were putting down palm branches and cloaks on the road and shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” what was Jesus thinking? If I had to make an educated guess, Jesus might have been thinking that things will not turn out quite like the people were anticipating. What do I mean by this?

To put things into context, we should be aware that what the people were doing as Jesus was entering Jerusalem, was nothing new. The palms; nothing new. The shouts of hosanna; nothing new. Where does this come from? Well, we see reference to Jesus’ reception in Psalm 118:27-28 in which it describes the greeting of a priest or prophet with leafy branches and giving praise to God. The understanding here is that a priest would enter into the city and then the temple and offer sacrifice on behalf of the people at the Altar of Sacrifice. Jesus, referred to as Rabbi, teacher, etc. would have been seen in this same light. However, the major difference is that Jesus’ sacrificial offering would not happen on the Altar of Sacrifice in the Temple but rather, on the altar of The Cross. This type of greeting also has implications to the way we pray at Mass.

On Passion Sunday, we enact in a very particular way Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem. On every other Sunday in the Church year and really every other Mass, we begin with the typical procession that we are accustomed to. This entrance has a relationship to Jesus entering into Jerusalem to offer sacrifice and we enter into it at Mass when these mysteries of the Lord’s Passion, Death, and Resurrection are made present to us at the altar in Church. Beyond this though, as Jesus enters into Jerusalem, we are invited to enter into the core of our faith, the Paschal Mystery, during this most Holy Week of the Church Year. The theme of entering in, is very present to us. This perhaps might just be the ticket for us this Holy Week as we try to remain focused. So much change has been forced onto us and all our traditional Holy Week celebrations are not happening as planned. However, this does not mean Holy Week has stopped, nor has our faith. God’s desire or plan for us is everlasting life. God’s mercy, love, and grace are very much in play; it is all still here, reaching out to us. Therefore, in this new light, we can ask God: what is it that you want me to see amidst all that is so different?

Lately, there has been a lot of things that are different and certainly, I’d say that the sacrifices and Lenten things we intended on doing several weeks ago took a major shift with the coronavirus pandemic. Life has changed dramatically and understanding sacrifice could mean something different to us today as we adapt to uncertain circumstances. As life has changed, we might feel like we’re up a tree right. However, even in life’s difficulties we can seek opportunity.

Let’s take the image of the tree. To begin with, we know that The Cross is often referred to as the Tree of Life, upon which Jesus saved us, gave us life by His death. At the same time, there is a second perspective to consider. Just before Jesus’ is arrested, we find him in the Garden of

Gethsemane amidst olive trees and experiencing great anxiety and distress, so much so that He is sweating droplets of blood. If we rewind for just a moment, we can look back at the Book of Genesis, and we see that The Fall, where our first parents Adam and Eve first sinned, was in a garden at a tree. Despite being in paradise and having anything they could have wanted, our first parents chose a course of pride, possessions, and power which defied God's will and ultimately became their downfall. Fast forward to Jesus, in the Garden of the Gethsemane, there He too wrestled with competing thoughts and worries. Jesus even says, *My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will*, (Mt 26:42). Jesus knows, in our lives, the temptations are real. When we are tempted, are we not in a garden experience too? Are we not at a tree? Perhaps, in our free time this week, we can go outside, and pray and reflect by a tree. In this experience, we can encourage ourselves to look around and see the beauty that surrounds us. We can also come to realize that it is in sin, what we end up doing is focusing in on the one thing that can be our downfall, failing to see all the goodness that surrounds us. Even in times of trial, do we reach for the fruit of the tree or do we choose the path of Christ? Jesus' path goes through trial and tribulation but ultimately leads to life, resurrection, and glory. The way of the Jesus, the new Adam, conquers where our first parents failed.

I suppose, given the entire Passion, there are so many more things to reflect on, and this homily could easily be a multitude of pages. However, I am going to point the focus in one other direction before I bring things to a close for this weekend.

When we look at what Jesus endured in His Passion, it is a litany of everything wrong that could happen to someone; betrayal, denial, disloyalty, abandonment, physical persecution, mental distress, death, and so on. In the thick of it all, Jesus on The Cross, cries out, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* These words, just like how the people greeted Jesus into Jerusalem, is nothing new. Rather, on The Cross Jesus is quoting from Psalm 22. Psalm 22 in its entirety starts off in anguish and abandonment and ends in triumph; in a word it is: redemptive. This Psalm has particular importance to us as we weather the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Psalm 22 encapsulates struggle and anguish but points to the triumph of those who are faithful to the Lord. Psalm 22, in its entirety can be a source of our reflection, prayer, and faithfulness in these times.

So, no matter what we might have been thinking when Lent began, during this Holy Week, let us enter into the mystery of Christ's life, death, and resurrection anew. When we feel we are up a tree, recognize that we have a choice to make, to take for ourselves or faithfulness to God's will. Lastly, let us take the gift of God's word, spoken by Jesus on the Cross in Psalm 22, let it be a reminder, that even in our sadness, sorrows, and difficulties that faithfulness leads to new life and glory. The Lord our God has not abandoned us, He has lived the depths of the human experience, He leads us to everlasting life and this my friends, truly is Good News. Amen.