

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion / Year A / April 5, 2020 (Fr. Giese)

For those who loved Jesus, his mother, his friends, his disciples, the holy women, and others, his arrest, trial, torture, and death on the cross must have seemed like a terrible nightmare occurring in real life. It all happened so quickly and while it was happening, they were powerless to stop it which brought to them an agony all their own. They suffered watching Jesus suffer, most especially his mother, which any of us can understand who have witnessed the hurt and pain of someone we love. In those moments we feel most helpless. But those moments are, in some ways, the ones that make us most like Jesus himself because they are moments of compassion which means to suffer with another who is suffering. Those moments are the ones in which we leave ourselves, even forgetting ourselves, to join with another hurting human being to alleviate their suffering if it is possible even in some way, or simply be with them to comfort them as best we can so that they are not alone in their time of need. In Jesus' parable that we refer to as the Good Samaritan, Jesus said that the beginning of the care the Samaritan man gave to the man who had been beaten and left on the side of the road was when he looked on him with compassion. He saw the man suffering and, in a sense, went outside himself and his life to join with the hurting man in his anguish. It was compassion that inspired him. It was compassion that made him neighbor to the man who was hurting. It was compassion, the willingness to suffer with him, that led him to care for him.

Compassion is not an instinct. Compassion is a choice, a decision, and it is not one that comes easily, even for saints. To choose to join yourself to someone who is hurting or suffering or struggling means to lose something of yourself, at least for a while, and to feel some measure of their pain within your own heart. No one can be both compassionate and indifferent because compassion comes from the heart.

There is a lot of compassion that is needed now. There are people everywhere who are hurting and suffering as the world deals with this epidemic that has touched almost all our lives to one degree or another. Some are suffering acutely such as those who are ill and hospitalized or hurting from the sudden loss of a loved one. Some are suffering from being isolated and alone. Some have suffered the loss of their jobs and are stressed along with their families. Some are

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afflicted with fear over what might be. Some are suffering from separation from their family members or from exhaustion in caring for the sick or taking care of others.

So, there is much need for compassion. And why should we choose to act with compassion now or any other time? Because the Son of God had compassion for us. His human life, his suffering and his death on the cross are the revelation that within the heart of God lay the desire to suffer with us, as one of us, and to suffer for us, suffering for the suffering caused by our sins, by our indifference, and by our pride. To look at Jesus on the cross and to realize that Jesus did that for you, for me, for each one of us, means knowing that God is anything but indifferent to us. We might be indifferent but God never is. Which is why when we choose to be compassionate, we are most Christ-like. Yes, there is risk in compassion. Yes, it takes strength. Yes, it involves the heart. But there is also grace, and goodness, and love and holiness. More than anything else it is compassion that makes a saint. It is strengthened by prayer, fortified by sacrifice, and perfected with practice.

This Holy Week you may not have palms, and hymns, and the veneration of the cross. You may be without adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and even Holy Communion itself. But you will not be without your compassionate God because you have compassion too.