

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings

April 9, 2017 11:30 a.m. St. Augustine Cathedral

Today, on this Palm Sunday, we begin once again the week that is the "holiest" and most special week of the year---a week during which we celebrate everything that is "holy" and "sacred" thanks to the suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Who won for us our eternal salvation. This Holy Week begins with today's celebration of Palm Sunday.

At the beginning of Mass, we were all given these blessed palm branches, which I hope you will all take with you and put in a special place in your homes and in your rooms, to remind each of us of the "fickleness" of human nature. The same crowds who were cheering Jesus with "Hosanna's" and wanting to make Him their King when He came into Jerusalem on Sunday, were the very same people just five days later who were **booing** Jesus as a criminal and shouting "Crucify Him"---"Away with Him". Within just a few days, Triumph turned into Tragedy.

During the Reading of the very long and beautiful Gospel account by St. Matthew recounting Jesus' suffering, death and burial, we proclaimed the lines of the "crowds"----representing Human Nature which, of course, includes all of us. Some of those phrases were hard to say, such as: "*Let Him be crucified*" and "*May His blood be upon us and upon our children*". It might shock us or rattle us to say something so awful. Yet it's so important to remind ourselves that it was **sin** which had separated the human race from God so badly that the only way to reconcile the division was for Jesus, the Son of God, to do what St. Paul so beautifully told us in today's Second Reading: "*He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness, humbling Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*"

That's really what sin is----it's turning away from God and God's ways because we would rather follow our own ways. It's changing our "Hosanna's" to "Boos". We're "fickle" followers of Jesus. We set out to follow Him faithfully and proclaim our loyalty; we have every intention of choosing to be faith-filled and virtuous in our daily activities; but then....we get side-tracked, detoured, hood-winked or seduced into thinking that some other choice or decision would be much more of an easy, fun, exciting, or rewarding way to go. All of a sudden, the palm branches of praise get tossed to the side of the road.

So, please keep the palm branch someplace where you can see it all year round as one of those important reminders that we are “fickle followers”, but ones who are trying to be faith-filled, faithful, and full-time followers of Jesus, our Lord.

One final point I would ask all of us to reflect on today, and through this Holy Week in a special way: the Passion Narrative we just heard isn't just about the awful things that some impersonal concept called “sin” did to Jesus 2,000 years ago. It is the Sin of Humanity that led to the Tragedy of Jesus' death and burial---the sin of generations before us, the sin of people who will live in the generations after us, and the sin of all of us living here and now, our own personal sins and the sins of the culture in which we are living.

But even more than the negative effects of sin, we realize that Holy Week focuses much more on the power and the grace of God's unconditional love for us and all the world. While humanity turned away from God, our God *never* turns away from us. Because of His suffering, death and resurrection, Jesus has taken away the sins of the world. And that is why we continue to proclaim our “Hosannas” before the Eucharistic Prayer of every Mass: “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Hosts....Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest!”

As we enter into this Holiest of all weeks, I hope that we will all do everything we can to make this a truly *Holy Week*. Perhaps you can find extra time to spend in prayer and reflection; maybe you can try to come to daily Mass over these next three days, including the beautiful Chrism Mass here on Tuesday evening; it would be wonderful if you could participate in the Easter Triduum on Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil.

But most of all, I pray that when we return next Sunday to celebrate the glorious Feast of Easter, we will be filled with new resolve to live our lives as joyful People of Faith who do what St. Paul urged us to do: “*At the Name of Jesus, every knee should bend of those in heaven and on the earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that **Jesus Christ is Lord!***”

God bless you, now and always!