

Homily Notes for Palm Sunday, April 9, 2017, Series A

Dual Readings: The Triumphal Entry – Matthew 21:1-11

The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Isa 50:4-7; Ps 22; Phil 2:6-11; Mt 26:14-27:66

Summary: This Palm Sunday is a good time to appreciate who Jesus really is.

1. Today's first reading, the third of Isaiah's four Songs of the Suffering Servant, indicates the very nature of the Messiah. It demonstrates that the Savior of the world is neither a military leader nor a politician but one who would demonstrate sacrifice and suffering, embodying the values of "agape" love and "mutual submission".

"And I have not rebelled, have not turned back. I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked by beard; my face I did not shield from buffers and spitting."

This clearly indicates that the Messiah (Servant) would submit to such suffering.

2. The second reading show again the essential quality of the Messiah.

"Although he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave... he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point to death, even death on a cross."

"Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Something that parents can highlight in home study is how firmly rooted our faith is in history. The Songs of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah were prophesied 700 years before the coming of Jesus. That is three times older than the age of the United States! We should be in awe of the historical continuity of our faith.

3. The first part of today's Gospel describes the royal reception which Jesus received from His admirers, who paraded with Him for a distance of two miles: from the Mount of Olives to the city of Jerusalem. Note the continual majesty of Jesus in everything he does and everything he directs as well as the superficial enthusiasm of the crowd. Yet, this too, highlights the sacrificial nature of his life. He is riding into Jerusalem at exactly the same time that the thousands of lambs are being brought into Jerusalem to be prepared for sacrifice.

4. The second part of today's Gospel, the Passion of Christ according to Matthew. We are challenged to examine our own lives in the light of some of the characters in the Passion story: Peter who denied Jesus, Judas who betrayed Jesus, Pilate who acted against his conscience as he condemned Jesus to death on the cross, Herod who ridiculed Jesus and the leaders of the people who preserved their position by getting rid of Jesus.

6. Note how Matthew is more preoccupied with the **majesty** of Jesus than with the psychological instability of the crowd. It is Jesus who is in command, always. He is aware of his power and prerogatives. His death has "**cosmic**" dimensions in Matthew. There is the eclipse of the sun and the rending of the curtain before the Holy of Holies in the Temple as well as an earthquake and the splitting of the rock ground. On Good Friday "the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints who had died were raised up..."

Here, again, is a good point for family discussion concerning the power and majesty of Jesus and that his death had a profound effect on the whole world. This indicates a very distinctive power.

7. At this time, while we are living through the crisis of the COVID-19 illness, its threats and its limitations, we need to be firm in our commitment to Jesus Christ. We must also understand clearly his distinctive call to discipleship. We need to remember our Lord's challenge to those who would be disciples:

"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt 16:24-25).

First, I encourage you as individuals and as families to set aside time for meditation and prayer. You have the readings for every weekday Mass, both in the online bulletin as well as at the USCCB website (USCCB readings). It would be good to read these passages and discuss as a couple or as a family what insight from God you can obtain for living today.

I encourage you to develop a pattern of family prayer. A daily Rosary will bring many blessings. It will also bring the Holy Spirit and his blessings personally into your home. Bishop Strickland has also recommended praying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy at three o'clock in the afternoon, especially Friday.

We also find many who are living out the values of our Lord, denying themselves, sacrificing a great deal, and responding to a higher call. It would be good to pray for them. Deacon Ragland has suggested a number:

For those most at risk: For those whose age and medical condition make them more vulnerable. For those who are without a home, who rely on social services to meet their daily needs. For those whose jobs are at risk. For migrants, immigrants, and refugees around the world who are already fleeing for their safety.

For those on the frontlines of response: For the nurses, doctors, and medical professionals who put themselves and their families at risk, showing up every day with energy, compassion, and resilience for the work of care ahead of them. For grocery store workers and truck drivers keeping shelves stocked. For home care providers, stay-at-home and work-from-home parents. For mail carriers and package deliverers.

For leaders making difficult and important decisions: For leaders of countries, states, and cities. For leaders of faith communities and places of worship. For leaders of schools, daycares, and social services. For leaders of businesses, small and large. For leaders of hospitals, nursing homes, and clinics.

For those who suffer: For those who are sick, for those who face death because of this virus. For those who suffer loneliness, depression, anxiety, and isolation. For those who have lost their jobs. For all of us, because in one way or another, we are all suffering right now.

For all those who have died from this virus: For their loved ones who mourn their death.

O Lord, hear my prayer, and let my cry come unto you. Hear my prayer for the end of this global pandemic. Hear my prayer for relief, healing hope and protection. Hear, O Lord, our prayers.

At this point, this time feels dark, but I as a Christian, I believe that Easter will come. That light hope and love will win out. Then this darkness will pass and one more we can walk with you in peace and justice. Amen

The following is taken from the “Meditation on the Two Standards” from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola. This helps us to decide to place ourselves in the camp of God.

1. **The Two Standards (flags, banners).** Picture in your mind the two camps, the first of Christ our supreme Captain and Lord; the other of Lucifer, the mortal enemy of our human nature.

2. **In preparation:**

The history – let us remember how Christ our Lord calls and wants all persons beneath his Standard, and how Lucifer, on the contrary, wants all under his.

The mental representation of the place – Here we see a vast plain covering all the region about Jerusalem, where the **supreme** Leader of the good is Christ our Lord; and another plain in the region of Babylon, where the evil chieftain of the enemy is Lucifer.

That which I desire – Here I am asking for a knowledge of the deceits of the evil chieftain and help to guard myself against them, and a knowledge of the true life which the supreme and true Leader reveals, and for the grace to follow and imitate him.

8. The Counter Contemplation: concerning the Enemy!

1. First is to imagine how the evil chieftain of all the enemy is seated in the center of the vast plain of Babylon, on a great throne of fire and smoke, a horrible and terrible sight to behold!
2. Second is to consider how he calls together countless demons, and how he scatters them, some to one city, some to another, throughout the whole world, missing no province, no place, no state in life, nor even any single person.
3. Third is to listen to the harangue which he delivers to them, how he spurs them on to ensnare men and to bind them in chains. He bids them first to tempt men with 1) the lust of riches (as he is accustomed to do), that they may thereby more easily gain; 2) the empty honor of the world (vanity), and then come to 3) unbounded pride. The first step in his snare is that of riches, the second honor, and the third pride. From these three steps Satan leads on to all other vices.

(See 1 Tim 6:10 – “For the love of money is the root of all evils....”).

One can also enter into temptation through sensuality (lust) and through the desire for power. Note that the monastic vows dealt with poverty (money), chastity (sex) and obedience (power).

9. The Second Contemplation: concerning our supreme and true Leader, who is Christ the Lord!

1. First is to consider how Christ our Lord takes His stand in a lowly place, in that great plain about Jerusalem, and He is beautiful and gracious to behold.
2. Second is to see how the Lord of the entire world chooses so many persons, apostles, disciples, etc., and sends them throughout the whole world to spread His sacred doctrine among men of every state and condition.
3. Third, is to listen to the discourse which Christ our Lord makes to all His servants and friends whom He sends on this mission, charging them that they should seek to help all persons;
First by encouraging them to embrace the most perfect spiritual poverty (no attachment to our possessions), and if it should please His Divine Majesty, to choose them for it, also to embrace actual poverty.
Secondly, by encouraging them to desire insults and contempt, for from these two things come humility.
So then there are three steps: the first, poverty opposed to riches; the second, scorn or contempt, opposed to worldly honor; the third, humility, opposed to pride. From these three steps, let them lead persons to all virtues.

10. Following Three Reflective Conversation (Colloquy).

1. **With our Lady.** Let us now have a conversation with our Lady. I will ask her to obtain for me from her Son and Lord the grace that I may be received under His standard, first, in the most perfect spiritual poverty, and should it so please His Divine Majesty to choose me, also in actual poverty, secondly, in bearing reproaches and offenses, thus imitating Him more perfectly, provided only I can suffer them without sin on the part of any other person or displeasure to His Divine Majesty. Afterwards, I will say the “Hail Mary.”
2. **With the Son.** I will then ask the Son to obtain for me the same graces from the Father and I will then recite the “Anima Christi.”
3. **With the Father.** Then I will also ask the Father to grant me the same graces and I will then say

the “Our Father.”

11. The Principle and Foundation from St. Ignatius of Loyola:

Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God, our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. All other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him fulfill the end for which he is created. From this it follows that man is to use these things to the extent that they will help him to attain his end. Likewise, he must rid himself of them in so far as they prevent him from attaining it.

Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent (spiritually free) to all created things, in so far as it is left to the choice of our free will and is not forbidden. Acting accordingly, for our part, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short one, and so in all things we should desire and choose only those things which will best help us attain the end for which we are created.

12. Final Reflective Questions:

1. What is the one thing out of this Mass that I must accept (adopt, change) in my life to become the better-version-of-myself that God makes possible for me?
2. What practical steps are suggested by this meditation, especially through the conversations with Our Lady, the Son and the Father in order to be united with Jesus under his Standard?
3. What might be issues in my life, especially related to “riches”, sensuality” or “power” that may be attracting me away from the beauty and honesty of Jesus to the lies and deceptions of the Evil One?
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