

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

April 14, 2019

11:30 a.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

May I point out the obvious fact that we have begun a very special week----a Holy Week! We began our Mass this morning by receiving Palm Branches, recounting Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, amidst the crowds of admirers (thinking Jesus might be the Messiah who might find a way to rid them of the feared Roman forces who were occupying their country and making their lives miserable); and so they waved their palm branches and shouted: "*Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord*". But as the tides turned over the next few days, many of those same people, as we heard, changed their tunes from admiring praises to condemning sneers, shouting: "*Away with Him; Crucify Him*".

Let the point not be lost on any of us how guilty each of us is for that fickleness of our human nature, and the pain we can cause, great or small, on those in our lives whom we can praise, or criticize, depending on how we might gain or lose!

Today's very long Gospel is known as the "account of Jesus' Passion". St. Luke is the Evangelist we hear from this year, and he records for us the graphic details of Jesus' suffering. We heard how one of Jesus' trusted apostles, Judas, betrayed Him; how after the Last Supper, Jesus went to pray intensely to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane to be spared from "drinking this cup"; and we heard about another trusted apostle, Peter, who denied even knowing Him. So, even before Jesus endured any of the extremely awful and painful physical torture, He had already entered into an emotional Passion of being betrayed, denied, and abandoned by those most near and dear to Jesus' Heart.

We can't help but see ourselves in many of those "characters" in this Passion Story: For example, in the religious leaders who plotted to have Jesus executed; in Pilate who "washes his hands" of Jesus, even though he knew in his heart he was innocent; or perhaps in the soldiers who were "just doing their jobs" while scourging Him mercilessly and mockingly beating a crown of thorns into His head; or those who kicked and beat Him along the Way to Calvary; or those who pounded the nails into His hands and feet.

But hopefully we can also see ourselves in those who were moved by compassion for Jesus: for example, Simon of Cyrene who helped Jesus carry His cross, the holy women who wept for Jesus along the way; with His mother, St. John and several other holy women who stayed at the foot of the cross to the bitter end; or in Joseph of Arimathea who donated his own new tomb so that Jesus could have a decent burial place.

It is important for us to see ourselves in all those who were in one way or another contributing to Jesus' Passion and Suffering (since it was in fact the sin of the world, and every human person in the world before, or since the Crucifixion who are responsible).

On the other hand, let's also try to see this event through Jesus' own eyes. What did He see as He walked the Way of the Cross, as He endured all the pain that could be inflicted, as He hung dying on the Cross? Thru it all, Jesus was filled with love. We see Jesus looking out from the Cross to those standing there, and down thru the centuries to each of us sitting here, and He loves us! We heard Him promise the Good Thief---and anyone who repents of their sins--- that he would be with him that very day in Paradise; we heard Him ask the Father to forgive them/to forgive us, for they/we didn't understand what we were/are doing.

This is not just the Account of Jesus' Passion; this is the Account of the greatest Love Story ever told---Jesus' love, not just for the world, but for you, and you, and you, ----- each of you, and me.

May I make four suggestions: 1) Take your palm branch home with you and place it someplace prominently in your home to remind you throughout the year of this Love Story, as well as the fickleness of human nature, and the evil that Sin, and our sins in particular, does. 2) Spend some quality time before an image of Jesus Crucified and let your hearts be moved with what Sacrificial Love looks like. 3) Make a particular resolution, or two, to focus on one of your habits/actions that you know causes another person pain or suffering, and resolve that you will, with God's grace, never do that act/habit again. 4) Finally, resolve to be more reflective of your own actions, more aware of other people's needs, more compassionate to the suffering--- emotional or physical---of people around you, as well as people suffering half-way around the world.

In other words, let us resolve to make this week special---an opportunity for God's grace----a truly Holy Week!