

March 28, 2021

11:30 a.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

...And so it begins! This holiest of all the weeks of our Liturgical Year invites us to walk with Jesus during these final days of His earthly ministry, following Him all along the way to the completion of His great Act of redeeming the human race. We begin this week by celebrating Palm Sunday----a Sunday that is special to all of us. We love to come to Church on this day----not only because we get to take our blessed Palm home with us, but also because these Palm branches are signs of life, and hope, and symbolize moments in our lives when we have given our shouts of acclamation and praise to Jesus, the Son of David, our Savior--- our King.

Who among those “adoring crowds” that we heard about in the Gospel at the very beginning of today’s Mass could have imagined how the tides would change in just a matter of days? Who among those people shouting out their “Hosanna’s” of praise ever dreamed that they would find themselves shouting words of “Crucify Him!” of this very same One who just days before was their Hero, but who had become the Scapegoat?! 2,000 years removed, we, who are “Christians”, “faithful Catholics”, “followers of Jesus our Savior”----we still find this dramatic shift from seeing Jesus as King to shunning Him as a criminal, almost impossible to understand. Jesus’ entire Life in this world was lived between those two extremes of “cheers” and “jeers”. When we come right down to it, most of our lives are lived in between those same two extremes as well.

Yesterday, I joined with about 50 dedicated and faith-filled people in a prayer service outside the Planned Parenthood facility here in Kalamazoo as we were concluding the “Forty Days for Life” campaign. It was a beautiful half-hour of peaceful prayer and giving public witness for a greater respect for human life and an end to the violent choice of abortion. Our prayers were interrupted 5 or 6 times during those 30 minutes by profane shouts and obscene gestures from people in cars driving by on that busy road; one car actually stopped in the middle of the road to shout “you’re all a bunch of hypocrites and wierdos”, and then sped off. I couldn’t help but think how that moment for all of us, along with all the “Hosanna” moments and the “Crucify Him” moments in all our lives, are somewhat similar to what Jesus Himself experienced---except that His was infinitely far worse.

Besides the parts of “the Crowd” in the reading of today’s Passion account, how do we express our “Hosanna’s”---our Love and Admiration for Jesus--- in our lives? How are you a sign of hope to others? How do you affirm other people in your lives, or offer them encouragement? Any act of charity---any spiritual or corporal work of mercy, from welcoming the “outsider”, to feeding the hungry, or caring for those in need---any good deed done to another in the Name of Jesus---- those are “Hosanna” moments.

However, as no one likes to admit and none of us are proud of: there are also those “crucify Him” moments----those times when we fall short in living as a disciple of Jesus; moments when we decide not to lend a hand, or put ourselves out for others---moments when we consciously choose to be rude, insulting and hurtful to others----moments when we’ve refused to forgive and work for reconciliation after someone has offended us---moments when we might stop in the middle of what we’re doing to yell violent comments toward others who think differently or have views that don’t agree with mine.

Sometimes we do well as followers of Jesus; sometimes we don’t. What is most important is that we don’t ever give up; what is most important is that we keep walking with Jesus all along the way of our own Journey of Faith, both at the good times and high points of our Faith Journey, as well as even during the bad times, when we are at the low points, when sin gets the better of us.

As we all know, this has indeed been a challenging year. This time last year, this Cathedral---in fact, all churches---were empty; we were in the midst of a nation-wide---world-wide---lockdown. Our Palm Sunday Mass, which I celebrated here, had no congregation here in person to receive the Palm; we relied on our virtual connection. Many of you probably never even received blessed palm last year.

Besides that, throughout this year we have endured a lot of anxiety, fear, grief, loss of loved ones, dramatic change, and much heartache. We lost a lot. But we also learned a lot, and gained a good bit; we witnessed the blooming of new life; we saw “faith”, “hope” and “love” in action in the perseverance and heroic efforts of so many people. We adjusted to new ways of doing things; we gained insight into the inner strength of the human spirit. In the midst of great pain, we looked for, and found many reasons for JOY!

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, our Loving God, Who “glorified” His Son, remains always with us, and even in the midst of sadness and suffering, urges us to embrace the Divine Will. With His Grace, He is always helping us “to be glorified” when we turn those “crucify Him” moments into “Hosanna” moments. He urges us to do all that we can to break the cycle of violence and discord that is so deeply engrained in the human spirit by uniting ourselves with Jesus, so that we too can rise again and again and again, just as Jesus did so victoriously in His once-for-all-time “Rising” that we will all celebrate a week from today on Easter. Jesus’ suffering, death, and burial opened the door to Resurrection; His “crucify Him” moment actually turned into the most glorious of all “Hosannas”.

Thru His Death and Resurrection, Jesus has saved all people from the power of sin and the lasting consequence of death. Jesus hasn’t just saved people generically; He has saved persons individually. He didn’t just save humanity; Jesus saved YOU, and Jesus saved me. This is the week for us to realize that reality in a new way. This is the week to ponder what that means. **We have been saved.** We need to embrace that gift, and to live our lives in a manner that acknowledges that we are saved. That is the Good News of Jesus Christ. But----not only has Jesus saved us; Jesus has also guaranteed that we are totally **safe** in Him. That is the other side of the Good News. **We are safe in Jesus.** We have nothing to fear; there is no power, force for evil, **nothing** that can threaten us. By **saving** us, Jesus has made us **safe** and secure in His Eternal Love.

May the blessed palm we take home with us today to place in prominent places in our homes, especially near our family Crucifix, remind us of our “Hosanna” moments, and remind us to live our lives expressing our Love for Jesus in word and deed. Please try to make this Week truly holy----special----a time for prayer as we remember who we are as joyful and courageous followers of Jesus.

May we follow Jesus today, throughout this Holy Week, right into the Joy of Easter Sunday, and all the days of our lives, because as St. Paul reminded us: *“Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”*. Amen!