

April 2, 2023

11:30 a.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Today marks the beginning of Holy Week. As practicing Catholics, one of the measures of our faithfulness is seen in our coming to Mass every Sunday. But, as we come together on THIS Sunday, we shouldn't just be looking to next Sunday, which of course is Easter Sunday, but rather on this entire week, which is called Holy, as a lived expression of our Faith.

Each day this week carries a designation of "holy", except of course for Friday, which is called "Good". And that means that we should regard what we do this week as "holier" than usual, trying to find ways to spend additional time in prayerful reflection with God, and in more charitable treatment of those in our lives, both at home and in our daily activities. In fact, the last 3 days of this week are observed as though they were one continuous "day" known as the Sacred Triduum---that is, the sacred 3 days of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. Everything that matters to us as People of Faith will be observed and celebrated between this Sunday and next Sunday.

It's also vitally important that we are very clear about the significance of all that is celebrated this Week. This is not about reliving a past event; it's about realizing in a new way how, what Jesus did for us 2,000 years ago, beginning on that first Palm Sunday and all that went on that holy week leading to Jesus' suffering, death and Resurrection, continues to be impacting each of us in our lives here and now.

We just listened to the lengthy account of Jesus' Passion and Death according to Matthew. It's a powerful, and disturbing, account of what sin and evil did to Jesus, the Son of God. But for these couple moments, I'd like to ask you to think back to the Gospel that we heard at the very beginning of the Mass---the brief Gospel account of Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, amidst the crowds of people waving palm branches, and strewing their cloaks on the road, kind of like a "red carpet" welcoming a "conquering King".

At the end of that Gospel passage, St. Matthew told us that "*the crowds kept crying out 'Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest'.*" But then, he added "*the whole city was shaken and asked 'Who is this?'*" Basically, Matthew was telling us that there

were two groups of people that day: those who saw Jesus as their Savior and King; and those who had no idea who He was---those who asked: “Who is this?”

It seems to me that all of humanity has been, and continues to be, divided into those two groups. Don’t we at times, find ourselves singing God’s praises with our “hosannas”, proclaiming that Jesus is our Lord; but then, at other times, we may find ourselves “shaken” in our Faith, asking ourselves ‘Who is this?’

When we stand up strong in our Faith, we are singing God’s praises; but, when we feel burdened by life’s challenges, by the struggles we go through every day to make good moral and loving choices motivated by our Faith----when we perhaps don’t even give making sinful choices a thought, they just happen---then we’re among those asking “Who is this?”

They were also the ones who yelled “Crucify Him” for no good reason; they were the ones who reviled Him, tortured Him, and crucified Him. This Passion account demonstrates that those who didn’t know Who Jesus truly is---those who were a part of the forces of evil---triumphed, as they in fact took the Life of the One Who made them too uncomfortable and Who they found to be too dangerous for them to deal with. But that was a momentary triumph, which in 3 days would turn to a devastating defeat for Evil, Sin and Death as Jesus would rise victorious on Easter Sunday, and sharing that victory with all of us baptized into Christ’s Body.

I pray that this Holy Week will once more renew our desire to be consistently among those who sing God’s praises. May the palm branches we take home with us remind us to proclaim our “Hosannas” to Jesus our Lord and Savior, even if, or when, we might occasionally lapse into that group who ask: “Who is this?”

St. Paul’s powerful words we heard in this morning’s Second Reading reminded us that Jesus freely *“emptied Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”* so that He, and WE, could be exalted. May those words inspire us to remain faithful to our mission, not just to practice our faith week to week, but to live it with great conviction day in and day out.

“At the name of Jesus...may we proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”