April 2, 2023—Palm Sunday

In the Gospel accounts of the Passion of Our Lord, we find the Last Words of Jesus. He spoke 7 times from the Cross. The last words of someone before they die has always been of great importance. The last words of Pope Benedict were so simple: “**Lord, I love you**.” He expressed the relationship with God that he had fostered all of his life—love and service and devotion to Jesus.

The last words of Jesus have divine significance for us. It took great effort for Him to speak from the Cross. In order to lift His diaphragm to speak, He had to press on the nails in His feet and pull on the nails in His hands. It produced excruciating pain. The Passion of St. Matthew, which we have just read has only one of the seven last words: “**My God, my God, why have You abandoned me?**”

Jesus took all the sins of the world upon Himself in the agony of the garden of Gethsemane. This meant He bore all the consequences of sin: such as, sorrow, despair and loneliness. These words express the weight of human suffering that He was experiencing. But there is an even deeper meaning to them because they are the first words of Psalm 22, which is the Responsorial Psalm of this Mass.

We only have a small part of that psalm in the Mass. It begins with the suffering and anguish of a man who is being tortured by his enemies, “**they have pierced my hands and my feet; I can count all my bones. They divide my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots**.” This can be so easily applied to Jesus’ crucifixion. The man of the psalm is mocked by his enemies, even as they torture him: “**All who see me scoff at me; they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads, ‘He relied on the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, if he loves him.**’ What were the Pharisees and other leaders saying as they passed by the cross of Jesus? St. Matthew told us: “**He saved others; He cannot save Himself. So He is the king of Israel! Let Him come down from the cross now, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God let Him deliver Him now if He wants Him**.” Again, the psalm foreshadows all that Jesus was enduring on the Cross.

In the middle of Psalm 22, there is a dramatic change. The first half spoke of suffering and anguish, but the second half thanks God for His victory. We got a glimpse of that in the portion of the Responsorial Psalm that we heard today: “**I will proclaim Your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly, I will praise You: ‘You who fear the Lord praise Him; all you descendants of Jacob, give glory to Him; revere Him, all you descendants of Israel**.’” God rescued that suffering man from his terrible trial and his response was praise and thanksgiving to God! Despite the way it begins, Psalm 22 is a psalm of thanksgiving and victory. When the Pharisees heard Jesus speak the first words of this psalm, they knew the ending, but they did not believe in Jesus and mocked Him even more.

As we enter this most Holy Week of the year, recalling the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, we too offer thanksgiving and praise to God. He has rescued us from the power of sin and the devil by the sacrifice of His Son. Jesus atoned for our sins and gave us a share in His victory. These events we are recalling this Holy Week are not of the distant past; they touch us here and now, they direct our lives, they keep our focus on Jesus and heaven. The most important way they touch us is through the sacraments. The greatest way to thank God is through the Holy Mass, which is the supreme sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Just a reminder, don’t let Good Friday be like any other day, especially in the hours between noon and 3:00 when Jesus was on the Cross. Read the Bible, watch a movie on the life of Jesus, say the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary, pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet, pray the Stations of the Cross, try to be united with Jesus in His suffering and death. Let’s make a good end to Lent and then we will be able to rejoice truly in the resurrection of the Lord.