

Palm Sunday A -Walk through Holy Week with Jesus

April 5, 2020

Jerusalem here we come. With Jesus, the Messiah, riding on the donkey, here we come. People, with palm waving, welcome. Waving palm and shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David, welcome. The Pharisees and the Chief Priests, watching with anger and outrage, plotting to persecute Christ who claims He's the Saviour of the world... People, with palm waving... and shouting "blessed is the He who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest." welcome!

Time flies. Lenten season is soon over: 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness praying and rebuffing Satan's temptations, the transfiguration on the mount, meeting the Samaritan woman at the well, making a blind person see on Sabbath day, raising Lazarus to life from the dead. Now Jesus is at a crossroad: to walk in his own way, to continue preaching, healing, performing miracles and be exalted by his followers, or enter humbly into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, fulfilling His Father's will to face persecution by the Pharisees and the Chief Priests, leading to His passion and crucifixion by the Romans.

What does it feel like to have less than a week to live? That's the situation in which Jesus finds himself when he makes the decision to fulfill His Father's will to make a "triumphal" entry into Jerusalem. The crowds don't know what's coming. The disciples have only a slight hint from Jesus that the Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of sinners and be killed. To the disciples and the crowds, entering into Jerusalem is a moment of incredible excitement. They have seen the miracles Jesus performed. If they could convince him to turn against Rome, they will make him their king. Witnessing Jesus' Jerusalem entrance on a donkey with the crowds waving palms in their hands and shouting "**Hosanna to the Son of David!**", the Roman rulers and the Jewish religious authorities can no longer pretend that He is insignificant, that He is not dangerous. Jesus is deliberately provoking the crisis that will end with him nailed to a cross. Then in less than a week, the crowd abruptly transition from hero-worship and joyful praise to Jesus to rage-filled demands for him to be crucified. The disciples move from proudly marching at his side through the streets of Jerusalem to slinking away in stomach-clenching fear, insisting they don't know who he is.

Holy Week, which begins on Palm Sunday, is our opportunity to immerse ourselves in this move from the false joy of Palm Sunday, a joy that is centred around expectations of power and reward, to the pain of finding that our faith is often so weak when Jesus needs us the most. The people involved in Jesus' death is much like us. The rejection and crucifixion continues daily when we hurt others through gossips and slanders, when we put others down for our own glory, honour and pleasure.

In the gospel on Monday in Holy Week (John 12:1-11), Jesus has his last meal at the home of his dear friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Maybe he wanted to do more than say goodbye. Maybe Jesus needed to see Lazarus alive, talking and eating and laughing. Maybe his human side needed **to reaffirm the evidence of his own eyes that, with prayer, someone can die and come back to life.** On Tuesday (John 13:21-38), Wednesday (Matthew 26:14-25) and Thursday (John 13:1-15) of Holy Week, Jesus' struggle with his approaching death continues. At the last supper, Jesus talks *about the impending betrayal by Judas, someone He knows, and the upcoming denial by Peter, the one He chooses as the rock on which the Church is built.* On

Thursday, in John's Gospel (13:1-15), Jesus **institutes the Eucharist and the washing of the feet of the Apostles**, a concrete example of servanthood. And finally he tells his Apostles that He will be with them for only a short time and tries his best to prepare the disciples for His departure by stating: "***A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.***" (John 13:34-35).

By Friday morning we have lost complete control of the situation. We suddenly find ourselves stumbling along with the crowds toward Golgotha hoping we are not recognized by anyone as one of Jesus' followers. There is a numb sense of disbelief as we watch him being striped and nailed to the cross. As time passes we hope that Jesus will unleash the power within him like healing people from illnesses, walking on water, feeding 5,000 with a few loaves and fish, to stop this cruel drama, come down from the cross and save himself. But nothing happens. Jesus simply lets his life bleed away, one agonizing moment at a time, growing weaker and weaker until to prove that he's given up on himself. But before he dies he cries: "***Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.***" (Luke 23:34) and with his last breath, he says, "***Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.***" This is the moment that we think the other disciples who hid away during the crucifixion absolutely had the right idea. Staring up at him on the cross, we realize that Jesus is actually going to die right in front of us. He cries out, takes his last breath, and the unthinkable moment comes to pass. The gospel says, "***At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.***"

During this Holy Week, are we the crowd who change our mind from welcoming to shouting "crucify him", or Peter who denies him for fear of death, or Judas, who is tempted by materialism to betray him, or other apostles who hide away scared to see the darkness and reality, or Simon of Cyrene who helps carry the cross, carrying it because of our sins? We can choose to be present with Jesus as his disciples throughout this week, confronting the ways in which we betray him, loving him as we see him struggle for the courage to endure his death. The only tools we need are prayers, the scriptures and open hearts to make this journey with Jesus. Like Jesus, our fear, our sin, our grief and our illusions about ourselves have less than a week to live. Jesus takes the sins of humanity upon himself in order to soften our hearts, by revealing the depth of his perfect love. The fact that God thought we were worth all that pain and suffering should reduce us to silence. We must not forget that Jesus died on the cross so that we might have new life. We should try in our own small, simple way to imitate him. Let us at least spend this week to be in complete union with Jesus.

Many medical experts say in the news that in the next few weeks, the coronavirus pandemic is in its crucial period. We need to continue the social distancing and self-imposed exile. In a spiritual sense, we need to step out from being citizens of materialism, pride and prejudice, power and prestige, wealth and possessions, lust and vanities, we need to cleanse ourselves from the plague of our sins and be united as citizens, brothers and sisters of the kingdom of God. We don't have to "read" the Morning Prayer in a hurry in order not to miss the bus to work. We don't have to rush through the Holy Rosary in order to spend more time in the grocery store on the 15% sales days. We now have more time with our Lord, digesting word by word the psalmody in the Morning Prayer. We have more time to meditate the Holy Mysteries in the Rosary. Parents can spend more times with their children, pray more often together. The COVID-19 quarantine is an excellent chance for Catholic parents to reclaim their role as their children's first and best educators in the faith.

*We'll spend time with Jesus and pray, We'll spend time with Jesus and pray, we'll
spend time with Jesus and pray. Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe We shall overcome, some
day.*