

**PASTOR'S MEANDERINGS**  
**PALM SUNDAY of THE PASSION of THE LORD**

**4 – 5 APRIL 2020**



**SUNDAY REFLECTION**

It may seem strange to give an account of Jesus' passion and death at the beginning of Holy Week and then again on Good Friday. In fact, it is both relevant and fitting that in commemorating Jesus' messianic entry into Jerusalem we also commemorate His passion and death because this latter is no less an essential aspect of His messiahship than the former. What Matthew emphasizes is the humility of Jesus. The messianic entry of Jesus is described in terms of a king entering a city, not as a victorious warrior on a charger, but as one coming in peace, mounted on a humble donkey. The other readings also focus on this. The reading from Isaiah brings out the humble confidence of the Servant in the midst of his suffering: 'The Lord comes to my help, so that I am untouched by the insults ... I know I shall not be shamed'. This passage leads naturally into the psalm which also describes trials and sufferings endured together with a prayer of confidence in God.

The second reading describes both the humility and suffering of Christ and His exaltation. It points out that His exaltation results from His humble obedience in accepting suffering even unto death – death on a cross. And therefore (literally 'that is why') God exalted Him. The exaltation of the perceived messianic king must give way to the Messiah, the Savior, who will achieve a victory far greater than a political or military one. But that victory will be achieved only by giving His own life as a ransom to redeem humankind from the dominion of sin and death to resurrection and the inheritance of the Kingdom of God promised to those who believe in Him. For this reason, in celebrating the messiahship of Jesus we must not stop at the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but follow Him all the way to Calvary, where, by dying on the cross, He will triumph forever over sin and death.

Even as we contemplate Christ's suffering and death, the Easter joy and triumph are anticipated in the preface which describes the paschal mystery: 'Though He was sinless, He suffered willingly for sinners. Though innocent, He accepted death to save the guilty. By His dying He has destroyed our sins. By His rising He has raised us up to holiness of life.'

### **HOLY WEEK ACTIVITIES**

**Prayer:** Try to spend Holy Week in greater reflection and quiet. Participate in the Easter Triduum services as they are live-streamed from St. Stephen, Martyr Parish: Holy Thursday 7:00 p.m., Good Friday 7:00 p.m., Holy Saturday 8:00 p.m.

**Fasting:** Think about Jesus' Passion, seeing His love expressed. Ask yourself, "What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What will I do for Christ?"

**Almsgiving:** Ask what contribution you can make to improve conditions at home, at work, at school, in your social life, in your community. How can you help bring people together into unity and peace according to Christ's desire?

### **REFLECTIONS FOR HOLY WEEK**

#### **Monday 6 Apr**

**Is. 42:1-7:** The Servant of Yahweh possesses the Spirit of God to restore right order between God and humanity. His demeanor will be gentle and merciful. But despite His humble bearing, the Creator will act through Him to reconcile all nations and bring healing and freedom. The servant songs of Second Isaiah form the readings for four days in Holy Week. They have had a profound influence on reflection on the mystery of Jesus' life, death and resurrection from the earliest Christian times.

**Jn. 12:1-11:** The prospect of Jesus' death is foreshadowed by the anointing, a ritual done for the deceased, but also one which denotes Jesus as Messiah endowed with the Holy Spirit and now entering on the final stage of His divine mission. The people surround Him, some out of curiosity, some with faith, Judas Iscariot biding his time to betray. The divine plan proceeds through the interaction of the differing human characters.

#### **Tuesday 7 Apr**

**Is. 49:1-6:** Isaiah speaks about the restoration of Israel and its mission to be a light to the nations. It is not simply that the people shall return to their former state before the fall of the Jerusalem but rather that God's power will see them, wholly transformed to the point that they show forth the glory of the Lord to those surrounding them. This reading is a reading of hope for those feeling isolated, despairing, lacking any sense of purpose in life, those who feel alone even when surrounded by others, those who feel that they are in exile. The American writer Og Mandino wrote: 'I will love the light for it shows me the way, yet I will endure the darkness because it shows me the stars.'

The second Song points to the destiny of Yahweh's Servant, whose life is planned by God from before His birth. He is assured of success although He might seem to falter. The Servant must bring justice to the whole of humanity and be a light to the nations. One does not look at a light but uses its power to perceive, the beauty and form of the surroundings and find a path forward. The Servant's example ought to allow the nations to appreciate the opportunities of

creation. Similarly, the Church is summoned to illuminate the dignity of human life by the quality of Christians' lives, to illuminate the dignity of human life by looking intently at the structures of their organizations and failing to look outward towards a world that expects hope and life.

**Jn. 13:21-33, 36-38:** Can you imagine participating in this meal? How would you respond to Jesus' words, 'one of you will betray me'? How would you react to His new commandment to 'love one another'? It is quite easy to think, 'I wouldn't betray Jesus' or 'Of course, I would love everyone so that all would know I am a disciple of Jesus'. It is much more difficult, perhaps uncomfortable, for us to stop and think 'but what if that wasn't the case?' Each one of us has moments of weakness where we do not live up to our fullest potential in our dealings with one another. Peter's strong words remind us to be as committed in our discipleship as he was, yet, on a deeper level, Jesus' words encourage us that we are to follow our commitment by our lives, both our words and actions. This reading allows us to sit with the drama unfolding in this passage and to question the core of ourselves: where are we in this scene?

### **Wednesday 8 Apr**

**Is. 50:4-9:** The servant experiences suffering – beatings, insult, spitting. Yet there is a strength and hope that he is untouchable because it is 'the Lord (who) comes to my help' and the Lord as 'my vindicator is here at hand.' The lyrics of a song called 'I Know Who Holds Tomorrow' similarly express hope in times of difficulties, uncertainties, and struggles in one's life. The overall sense of the song is that through the uncertainties of what tomorrow might bring or what life holds in store for us, we can remain grounded in our faith that we know who holds our hand. Such is the confidence of the servant in the power of his Lord that he repeatedly declares that the Lord is his help and vindicator.

When we have times of oscillating feelings of hope and brokenness, to whom do we call and who comes to our aid? Where do we discover God in our life today, to find our faith afresh, and re-discover we can place our trust in him, when all seems to be disintegrating.

**Mt. 26:14-25:** In this scene, we have the familiar image of Judas Iscariot as the one who actively seeks out an opportunity to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (vv. 14-16). Today is sometimes called Spy Wednesday. The Gospel reading also depicts a concern for the preparation for the Passover Feast. Jesus shares a meal with His disciples and they are distressed at the notion that one of them will betray their Lord. Judas is singled out as saying, "Not I, Rabbi, surely?"

In our most vulnerable moments, when we feel lost, hopeless, cast aside, abandoned, angered, scared, frail, and utterly alone, we can identify with this Gospel's image: that Jesus shares His meal with the ones who abandon Him offers us hope that despite human failings, we too can find a way to embrace those who do us wrong when we are at our lowest ebb in life.

### **NON-ATTENDANCE AT THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS**

We are in the midst of confronting a situation that is unprecedented in any of our lifetimes. A time when our churches are closed and Mass with the availability of the Eucharist is not routinely available.

Many people feel powerless in the face of this pandemic. We see in a devastating way how widely a virus spreads person to person. We have confidence that God allows the good that we

do, our prayer and our actions, to make a positive impact on brothers and sisters. As Pope Francis encourages us, "Let us call upon him today, firmly rooted in prayer, for without prayer all our activity risks being fruitless and our message empty." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 259)

As you are well aware all public Masses have been suspended in the Diocese of Richmond until further notice. This means that in effect a dispensation has been granted that releases Catholics from fulfilling their Sunday obligation (Mass). As I stated above this an extraordinary event and action on the part of our bishop. How do we, should we respond? Obviously not with the attitude that I've been given a freebie. The right thing to do is to stay home for your safety and the safety of others. We have entered into what quite legitimately may be called a paradoxical situation of 'togetherness' and 'separation'. Together in the sense that we recognize what binds us together as family, a people, a society. We exercise this by concern for each other, checking in through the various means of electronic communication so as to support and care for each other as appropriate. And at the same time, out of a concern for mutual safety we maintain that significant distance that will help to mitigate the transfer of a contagious virus.

Though there is a sadness for not being able to participate at Mass, one should not feel guilty for not going to Mass. You have a free conscience to stay home. Catholics are encouraged to offer up their sickness or pastoral care for the sake of those who are seriously ill and for those who have died.

While all of our programs have been hurt by the shutting down of normal parish activities most have been adapted to other formats for presentation. But, absence from Mass has had the largest impact.

### **WHAT TO DO IF YOU CAN NOT ATTEND MASS?**

First, please be aware that while all public Masses have been suspended by order of the bishop; each priest is required to celebrate a private Mass daily with the principal intention being that of the welfare of his parish.

Second, Catholics are encouraged to make a 'spiritual communion'. St. John Paul II wrote that "it is good to cultivate in our hearts a constant desire for the sacrament of the Eucharist". This was the origin of the practice of 'spiritual communion', which has happily been established in the Church for centuries and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life. Saint Teresa of Jesus wrote: "When you do not receive communion and you do not attend Mass, you can make a spiritual communion, which is a most beneficial practice; by it the love of God will be greatly impressed on you." (*Ecclesia Eucharistia*, no. 34)

Mass is live-streamed daily, weekdays and Sundays from St. Stephen's

### **How Do I Make a Spiritual Communion?**

Below are some recommendations on how to make a 'spiritual communion' when unable to participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

1. Gather with others in your household and begin a time of prayer with the sign of the cross.
2. Take time to read and reflect upon the readings from the weekday Masses and those from the Sunday Mass. These can be found in the Pastor's Meanderings along with brief commentaries.

**Mass is live-streamed each day at 8:30 a.m. and is then posted to our church's website**

3. Share prayer intentions quietly or aloud.
4. Pray the Lord's Prayer.
5. Pray one of the following prayers of spiritual communion (see below).
6. Close with the sign of the cross.

**An Act of Spiritual Communion by St. Alphonsus Liguori**

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.

I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul.

Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally,  
come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.

Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

(This prayer is said at the normal time of the reception of Communion  
at each Mass celebrated in the parish church on your behalf.)

**PRAYERS**

As we take steps to protect ourselves and others physically from the spread of COVID-19, let us also remember to turn to God for protection and healing. Below are some prayers that you can include in your daily routine and we invite you to join us in praying for peace, protection and healing.

**Holy Virgin of Guadalupe**

**USCCB Prayer to the Virgin at this time of Coronavirus Pandemic**

Holy Virgin of Guadalupe, Queen of the Angels and Mother of the Americas.

We fly to you today as your beloved children.

We ask you to intercede for us with your Son, as you did at the wedding in Cana.

Pray for us, loving Mother  
and gain for our nation and world,  
and for all our families and loved ones,  
the protection of your holy angels,  
that we may be spared the worst of this illness.

For those already afflicted  
we ask you to obtain the grace of healing and deliverance.  
Hear the cries of those who are vulnerable and fearful.  
Wipe away their tears and help them to trust.

In this time of trial and testing  
teach all of us in the Church to love one another and to be patient and kind.  
Help us to bring the peace of Jesus to our land and to our hearts.

We come to you with confidence  
knowing that you truly are our compassionate mother,  
healer of the sick and cause of our joy.

Shelter us under the mantle of your protection,  
keep us in the embrace of your arms,  
help us always to know the love of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

**Prayer in Times of Anxiety and Fear**

**St. Teresa of Avila**

Let nothing disturb you,  
Let nothing frighten you,  
All things are passing away:  
God never changes.  
Patience obtains all things  
Whoever has God lacks nothing;  
God alone suffices.

**SCHEDULE FOR HOLY WEEK**

**MONDAY 6 APRIL**

**Morning Mass Live-streamed 8:30 a.m.**

**TUESDAY 7 APRIL**

**Morning Mass Live-streamed 8:30 a.m.**

**WEDNESDAY 8 APRIL**

**Morning Mass Live-streamed 8:30 a.m.**

**HOLY THURSDAY 9 APRIL**

**Mass of the Lord's Supper Live-streamed 7:00 p.m.**

**Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle**

**Live-streamed till 12 Midnight**

**GOOD FRIDAY 10 APRIL**

**Stations of the Cross Live-streamed 3:00 p.m.**

**Liturgy of the Word and Veneration of the Cross**

**Live-streamed 7:00 p.m.**

**HOLY SATURDAY 11 APRIL**

**Blessing of Easter Foods Live-streamed 12 Noon**

**Vigil Mass of Easter Live-streamed 8:00 p.m.**

**Easter Sunday 12 April**

**Mass Live-streamed 8:30 a.m.**