

Year A - Passion Sunday – 09 April 2017
Matthew 26:14 – 27:66

This morning we have listened to the entirety of the Passion Story. This is a difficult story of our truth that we need to grapple with. There should be no avoiding it. There should be no trying to escape it. As Christians, we are called to participate fully in the life of Christ, as it is lived out and witnessed to in the Church. And so, as I have done for the past five weeks, I welcome you ... I welcome you into your humanity ... I welcome you into a time of difficult waiting ... I welcome you to embrace what has been given to you so that you may more fully appreciate the gravity of the gift you have been given through the very Passion of Jesus Christ.

My very first Passion Sunday after I was ordained a priest, I prepared the liturgy to celebrate the Liturgy of the Palms and then enter into the Passion of our Lord. Hymns were chosen for each. We were to sing "Ride On, Ride On in Majesty" as we processed triumphantly into the Church with our Palm branches waving, and we were to leave the service in silence after having sung "Go To Dark Gethsemane" as our recessional hymn.

What I was not aware of was the tradition in the Parish, (a tradition long gone in that Diocese) of celebrating Palm Sunday *without* the acknowledgement of the Passion at all. The congregation, for the most part, would then completely bypass the Parish Holy Week and Paschal Triduum services, and show back up for Easter. They only ever experienced the Triumphal Entry to Jerusalem and the magnificence of the Risen Lord. They refused to live through the difficulties that come when the body of Christ – that being the gathered community that is the Church – actually spends time with that original body of Christ, in Jesus, as he walks the path that is indeed *our salvation*.

A lot changed for the congregation that morning when they processed in to the Church and as they recessed out of the Church. You see, the choir made the decision to change the liturgy so that Palm Sunday wouldn't be so depressing. Rather than a triumphal entrance, we raised our palm branches to "Go to Dark Gethsemane" and we exited the building at the end of the liturgy singing, at the occasion of Jesus' hanging on the cross, "Ride On, Ride On in Majesty". There was a tragic absurdity that brought the entire congregation into a new and profound understanding of just what it is we are doing when we gather, beginning with the Liturgy of the Palms, moving quickly into the solemnity of the Passion, and then into the invitation to spend a Holy Week in prayer, in contemplation, in community, in mourning, and then ... on Holy Saturday night, in that equally profound movement from the darkness that was before creation, into the new Creation that is given us, for free, in the Resurrection.

I know that there are some who think that I am too "depressing" during the season of Lent. And I also know that there are folks who will choose to bypass this Holiest of Weeks and just return next Sunday for baptisms and flowers and a redecorated church. But I need to challenge you on that. As your priest it is my responsibility to both be honest with you and to help you prepare for the moment when you too will enter into your last moments on this plane. Will you be prepared to face Jesus himself and say, "yes, I sincerely and deeply appreciate the new life you are giving me, simply because you love me"?

There are many, many ways that you, as a Christian, live and prepare for that moment when you will be asked if you are ready for your new life. One of the ways that you can prepare; one of the greatest ways to really develop a deep sense of appreciation for just what exactly Jesus is giving you in that moment, is to enter into his sacrifice, just as you are invited to enter into what his sacrifice earned for you.

I encourage you to spend this week on your knees. I invite you to come into this holy space each evening and allow yourself to be uncomfortable for a few days, so that you might better appreciate the heavenly comforts for eternity.

Join us for evening prayer on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Allow me to wash your feet, reminding me of whose servant I am, and reminding you how you are called to humble yourself in God's presence, as we receive Communion together on Maundy Thursday evening. Take your place in this Church throughout the night, praying with and beside the Sacrament in the dark hours when Jesus waited and prayed alone. Gather at the foot of the Cross on Good Friday. And then, on Saturday evening, allow yourself the gift of completion as we celebrate not just the Resurrection but the beginning of God's will through the culmination of God's will - from beginning to end, and new beginning to no end...

I exhort you to enter this Holy Week with a holy trepidation and emerge from it with a transformed sense of what it is to be in God's presence through Jesus as man, as sacrifice and as God.