

Today, we started with Jesus entering Jerusalem to shouts of exultation -“Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is the he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest - and as we have just heard, in the last week of His life, Jesus show us his humanity and how he can relate to our life because He was betrayed by friends, condemned by lies told about him, ridiculed by those who didn’t believe in him, mocked by those who didn’t understand him, and crucified by those who were afraid of His Truth.

Saint John Paul II stated during a Palm Sunday homily in 2002 that the cross is very much the focus of our liturgy today and by our faithfulness we show that we do not fear the cross of Christ but instead we love and venerate the cross because it is the sign of our Redeemer who died and rose again for us. For all of us who believe in Jesus crucified and risen, we carry the cross as proof that God is love. Jesus shows us the true meaning of kingship in the total self-giving of His life to conquer both sin and death.

The Passion narrative shows the fidelity of Christ amid our human infidelity. And St. Paul shows us this in the reading from Philippians today that Jesus emptied himself, taking the form of a slave so that we could become adopted sons and daughters of God the Father. Not only did Jesus empty Himself, He was vulnerable, He surrendered Himself into the hands of others, He gave everything He had so that we may have life. Jesus reveals to us the fullness of a human life lived out with integrity, honesty, courage and fidelity.

In a homily from 2014, Pope Francis asked those listening and I ask you to do the same now – ask yourself, who am I, before my Lord?

- “Is my life asleep, like that of the disciples who slept while the Lord suffered?” – Am I attentive to His Will in my life?
- “Am I like Judas, who pretended to love, and kissed the Master to give him over, to betray him? – Are there areas in my life where I do not follow His teachings?
- Am I like Pilate - “When I see that the situation is difficult, do I wash my hands and not know how to accept my responsibility and let people be condemned, or condemn them myself?” – Do I let peer pressure dictate my response?
- “Am I like the crowd that chooses Barabbas? For them it was more entertaining to humiliate Jesus.” – Do I spend time helping the most vulnerable in society?
- “Am I like the soldiers who strike the Lord, spit upon him, insult him, have fun humiliating him?” – Do I always show the Lord proper reverence in respect in how I live out my life?
- “Am I like the Cyrenian who was returning from work, tired, but who had the good will to help the Lord carry the cross?” – Am I willing to help others even when it is not convenient?
- “Am I like those who passed in front of the cross and joked about Jesus: “He was so courageous! Let him come down from the cross and we will believe in him! – Do I sometimes gossip and make fun of others?
- “Am I like those courageous women, and like Jesus’ Mother, who were there, suffering in silence?” – Do I humbly unite my sufferings with those of Christ?
- “Am I like Joseph, the hidden disciple, who carried Jesus’ body with love, to put him in the tomb?” – Do I do the work of Christ while seeking no recognition?

As we enter Holy Week, and because we are created in the likeness and image of God, God is saying to us just as he did the disciples – If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. Just like he suffering servant in the first reading from Isaiah, we must know and embrace these words - The Lord GOD is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame. In the Holy Spirit series, we have been doing over the last couple of months, Father Dave Pivonka says in every episode, we must ask for the Holy Spirit to come into our lives. And as we ask for the spirit to fill us, we must also ask that same spirit to help us to empty ourselves of all pride, ego, worry, fear,

anxiety, and anything that inhibits us from faithfully living out our lives following Jesus. There is a song by Chris Sligh called "Empty Me." I would like to share the lyrics with you:

I've had just enough of the spotlight when it burns bright... To see how it gets in the blood ... And I've tasted my share of the sweet life and the wild ride... And found a little is not quite enough ... I've seen just enough of the quick buys of the best lies ... To know how prodigals can be drawn away ... I know how I can stray ... And how fast my heart could change ... everything is a lesser thing compared to You ... Empty me of the selfishness inside ... Every vain ambition and the poison of my pride ... And any foolish thing my heart holds to ... Lord empty me of me so I can be filled with You.

As we go through this Holy Week, let us accompany Jesus to Calvary because it is not a place of endings but is instead a place of beginning where the Paschal Mystery is on full display. Indeed, the cross is the focus of our liturgy today because it assures us that light is greater than darkness, that forgiveness is greater than sin, that love is stronger than hate, and that life is greater than death. May our faith in the resurrection of Jesus strengthen each one of us to accept those deaths without which we cannot live our lives to the fullest. May we find the courage to walk in the footsteps of Jesus this week and enter the joy of his resurrection next Sunday morning.