

## Homily before the Reading of Luke's Passion on Palm Sunday

Luke 19:28-40 - Peace in heaven and glory in the highest [Palm Procession]

Isaiah 50:4-7 - The Lord God is my help

Responsorial Psalm 22 - "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me"

Philippians 2:6-11 - Christ became obedient even to death, & God exalted him

Luke 22:14-23:56 - The Passion according to Luke

♪ Oseh shalom bim-ro-mav, hu ya-a-seh shalom aleinu.  
V'al kol yisrael, v'im ru, im ru amen. ♪

That chant is a part of the mourner's kaddish, a prayer at the end of the synagogue service which is prayed *for* and with all who are grieving the loss of loved ones. I prayed it in January at the funeral of the Jewish wife of a Catholic man whose family I am close to.

The disciples of Jesus sang it on every Sabbath.

The official translation is: "May the one who causes peace to reign in the high heavens, send peace to us, to all Israel and to all the world, and let us say: Amen."

That song came into my mind as I was praying over today's readings.

The Gospel we heard at the beginning of the Mass - where Luke writes, "Blessed is he who comes *as king* in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" is the one that is read before the palm procession. It describes Jesus as that king who makes peace reign. [Luke and John are the only ones who refer to Jesus as king when he enters Jerusalem].

He comes in peace, as any Jew would know, because he is riding a young colt, and not a full grown warhorse. [It would be like coming into the city on a Fiat rather than a tank].

That was how a king would say, without words, that he was coming in peace,  
rather than with an army on horseback to conquer by force.

And the Gospel makes the point that the peace Jesus brings includes even the stones, the animals and the plants. When I was in Israel a number of years ago, one of the tour guides in the Armenian section of Jerusalem pointed to some stones and told us that they were the very stones that would have cried out if the people had not. We laughed, but we got the point.

Jesus is the fulfillment of that song from the Synagogue, even while he is being condemned. A Rabbi once told me that the Hebrew really means: "*The one who causes peace to reign in the heavens, SENDS peace to us, to all Israel and to the whole world.*" So that Jewish chant is a prophesy of the coming of the Messiah. And Paul writes, "Jesus is our peace."

In Luke's passion, which we will hear today, Jesus is presented as praying, healing and forgiving, just as he was throughout the Gospel.

Luke's account of the Passion does not include the response we sang to Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me." That is only in Matthew's and Mark's passion which we hear next year and the year after.

But there are several scenes and words which are *only* in Luke's account. I invite you to *listen* for them today: First there is Jesus healing the ear which one of the disciples cuts off, (In John's Passion which is read in Good Friday, we hear that the disciple is Peter),

Then there is Herod and Pilate becoming friends (Jesus even causes reconciliation for his enemies); then there is Jesus looking at Peter right after Peter denies him.

Three of the "*Seven Last Words*" - phrases which Jesus speaks from the cross - are only in Luke:

*"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do",*

*"I say to you, this day you will be with me in Paradise,"*

which he says to the thief who turns to him in prayer

*"Into your hands I commend my spirit,"*

a quote from Psalm 31, which we will use on Good Friday.

As we listen to the Passion today, we are invited to make a choice.

Just like the people who were there when it was happening:

The story of the Passion of the Christ questions each of us:

Will I hold on to power and my own will, like the Pharisees and chief priests?

Will I hold on to the fear of looking weak or of what others may think, like Pilate?

Will I give in to despair and mockery, like Judas and the unrepentant thief?

Or

Will I turn to Jesus in the midst of pain, grief and weakness, like Peter who weeps bitterly right after Jesus looks at him, or like the good thief (and he was a really good thief, he stole heaven), or

Like the women who wept for Jesus and stood by his cross, or

Like Joseph of Arimathea who risked his standing with powerful people and former friends  
to bury Jesus.

And the choice continues to be ours today, at the beginning of this Holy Week.

Every time I make the choice to turn to Jesus, every time

I risk saying, with the good thief, "*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom*",

I receive the power to pray with Jesus, "Your will be done,"

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,"

and "Into your hands I commend my spirit."



### Good Friday 2016

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 *He was wounded for our sins*

Responsorial Psalm 31 - "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9 Jesus is able to sympathize with our weakness

John 18:1-19:42 - The Passion according to John

Homily before the Reading of the Passion According to John on Good Friday

The Liturgy of Holy Week always presents two different versions of the Passion: One from Matthew, Mark or Luke on Palm Sunday and one from John on Good Friday. This past Sunday we heard Luke's Passion.

The Gospels give us four different points of view of the same events in the life of one person, Jesus the Christ. It's like looking at an instant replay of the last few minutes of a basketball game during March madness. It's the same game, but you can see different parts of it more clearly from different camera angles.

It is like looking at different facets of a beautiful diamond.

These different accounts of the Passion over a three year cycle on Palm Sunday, along with the Passion according to John on every Good Friday, make it possible for people with very different spiritual needs to find meaning in the cross.

Sometimes I need to hear the words Luke records, words we heard this year, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"* or *"Into your hands, I commend my spirit."* We need to hear them not only as the attitudes of Jesus but also as the attitudes of a true disciple of Christ.

Sometimes I need to experience the truth that Matthew and Mark portray: that Jesus felt the depth of abandonment - and cried out, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,"* As we sing every Palm Sunday.

At other times I need to see Jesus as John portrays him today: Someone who is sure of his identity: Christ the King, trusting the Father from start to finish, with Pilate on trial rather than Jesus, with the High Priest confirming the Old Testament prophecies without even knowing it.

From the earliest days of the Church until today writers, composers and filmmakers have presented their own interpretation of the Passion of Christ, each from their own point of view. Tyler Perry presented a unique re-telling of the story just last Sunday on the Fox network.

Every attempt to look honestly at these events at the end of the life of Jesus enriches our understanding - but not one of them is perfect or complete. And the ones closest to the original events are still the Gospels themselves.

Christ remains the model of what it means to be fully human and fully divine, but even in the Gospel accounts, some of the attitudes of the characters in the drama, and even of those who tell the story are not attitudes we are called to imitate. In a word, they are not the attitudes of Christ, and it is clear from all of the New Testament that we are called to put on the mind of Christ.

You will hear in John's account of the Passion many references to "the Jews" as the ones who opposed and crucified Jesus - while Luke refers more often to the chief priests and scribes. At this time in the history of the Early Church Christians were being persecuted. They were excluded from the Synagogue, for example, which put them at greater risk of being persecuted by the Roman Government.

Later theologians and some political and religious leaders have used this bias to justify hating the Jews and persecuting them. This is the pattern of many kinds of racism and scapegoating that continues to our own time. The Church has explicitly rejected this opinion, beginning with John XXIII and strongly repeated by John Paul II, Benedict and Francis.

The Holy Spirit is still purifying the human element of the Scripture, just as Jesus has purified the Old Testament teaching on hating enemies and the Spirit of Jesus has contradicted St. Paul's acceptance of slavery. The Spirit of God is still purifying the Church.

Was this Gospel writer somewhat anti Semitic? Yes, because his community was being persecuted by the Jewish community of his time. Does that mean that we can have that attitude? No, any more than we can imitate the attitudes of Pilate, Peter, or Caiaphas during the events of Good Friday.

As we enter into the Passion according to John today, I invite you to listen and respond with the attitude of Jesus.

Let yourself feel the violence and fear of Peter, the despair of Judas, the compulsion to control of Annas and Caiaphas, the blood lust of the mob and the cynicism of Pilate & his surrender to the shouts of the mob to save his own skin. Let yourself feel those feelings - so you can repent of those attitudes in yourselves and ask the Lord to heal them.

Let yourself experience the new freedom of Barabbas, the hope of the mother of Jesus and Mary of Magdala, the compassion of the beloved disciple, and the courage of Nicodemas and Joseph of Arimathea,

-so you can imitate them and approach closer to the attitude of Jesus himself.



