

Homily for Palm Sunday

*“You are here, Moving in our midst, I worship you, I worship you.
You are here, Working in this place, I worship you, I worship you.
Way Maker, Miracle worker, Promise keeper, Light in the darkness,
My God, That is who you are.” ~ Way Maker, by Osinachi Joseph*

These beautiful words from the song “Way Maker” remind us of who our God really is. A God who sets out a path before us, makes a way for us where there was none. A God who does and *will do* mighty, wonderful, unexpected things in our life. A God who never lets us down. A God who shines light so we can see love, see hope; see Him even in the most dark, difficult moments. Never is this truth more clear to us than when we read the Passion account of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

So today, on Palm Sunday, we remember that our God does not have the Coronavirus. Our God has not isolated Himself. Our God does not social distance Himself from us or keep six feet of distance between us. No. Today, as always, our God draws close, gives us a loving embrace, and speaks to our hearts in the words of the Gospel and the Passion readings we just read. In a world absent of handshakes and hugs and kisses, boy do we need God’s embrace. Let’s spend a few minutes reflecting on those readings.

When we read the Passion story aloud in church, there are usually several different readers with several different roles being portrayed.

Consider the role of the *narrator* (the part usually read by the deacon - boy I miss that this year) and how the narrator is like an outside observer - detached, unemotional, not part of it. To the narrator this is just a story to tell.

Consider the role of the *voices* – Peter, Judas, Pilate, and the Chief Priests. Unlike the narrator, they are living it out, emotional, alive involved, part of it!!! Peter - struggling, trying to be loyal to Jesus but failing at critical moments. Others doubted Jesus – like Pilate did. Others rejected Jesus – like Judas and the Chief Priests.

Consider the role of the *crowd*. Why did they all yell “crucify Him!”? Weren’t there many who started to accept Jesus and His teachings? What happened? What happened to all those people cheering “Hosanna” that we heard in today’s Gospel? We know they were manipulated, strong-armed by the powerful Jewish leaders. Many wanted the changes Jesus preached but were too afraid to speak out for fear of their own safety.

Consider closely the role of *Jesus* – His strong belief and commitment to those beliefs. His courage. His trust in God the Father.

As we reflect on the Passion reading it occurs to me how alive and meaningful the Passion reading is for us today. The season of Lent and the Passion reading challenges us to examine what role we are called to take on as we live in this world, as we live out our faith lives, and our lives with Jesus.

We know there are those in our world who are narrators, who view the life of Jesus and the Catholic faith as just a story with no meaning for their lives today. Like narrators, they are outside observers not PART of the story. THIS IS NOT OUR CALL. Lent reminds us the Passion is *our story*. We are *all* intimately involved. God’s love for us is real and alive. Jesus gave His life for *us*.

As we live out our story, we know there are times we take on the roles of the voices and the crowd we just heard in the Passion, don’t we? Like Peter and the others, we struggle and try to follow but often stumble. We have moments of doubt and fear and even times we give into temptation and turn our back on Jesus’ teachings.

But we are not called to lives of doubt and fear and confusion. Lent and the Passion remind us we are called to something more – we are called to be “Christ-like”; to be like the “*Way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper, light in the darkness...*”

Today, Palm Sunday, starts that special week in the Church year we call “Holy Week”. It is a week we Catholics set aside to recall that God promised one day we would return home to heaven and share in eternal life. It is a week we remember God kept that promise and we remember in detail just *how* He kept it.

God promised us a Savior and He delivered!!! He sent His only Son to lead us home. God tells us if we follow Jesus, obey His teachings, and allow ourselves to be changed – we *can* become “Christ-like”. Year after year (and this year is no different) we set this week aside as special, so that we never forget. Never forget what Jesus said and did and sacrificed for us.

Holy week calls us to be amazed, *awed*, that God could love you and me so much. So much that He would not deny us; would save us no matter what the cost.

Jesus could have avoided all this; walked away at any time. He could have told His enemies, “Just spare my life and I’ll deny everything I ever taught, you’ll never hear from me again.” But He didn’t!!! He came to lead us back home and He knew our *only* way back is to follow Him – to become “Christ-like”.

Jesus loves us so much that He gave up His own life to show us sin and death have no power over Him (and no power over us if we follow Him). He showed us eternal life is real and we belong there. Jesus loves us so much that He gave us Himself in the Eucharist so He could dwell in us, guide us, and strengthen us on our journey back home to God.

During Holy Week we are called to make an even more intense effort to be “Christ-like”. Today’s Gospel and Passion readings point to particular actions that help us become more “Christ-like”. We are called to TRUST as Jesus trusted in His Father’s will, no matter how difficult things might seem. Jesus knew what was ahead of Him when mounted that donkey but He pointed it toward Jerusalem and rode toward those challenges with trust. He trusted that God was squarely in control and that God’s will was best.

As Catholics in today’s world - a world whose values are often in opposition to Jesus’ teachings - we too are challenged. We face challenges as parents, students, business people – to choose life and love and care for others in a “me first” world. We are called to ride into those challenges, as Jesus did, trusting God is with us.

In our Passion reading we are also reminded that as Jesus' followers we are called to forgive – and not just when it is easy or convenient – but to forgive no matter how much we have been hurt. There is a phrase in the very long Passion reading that might easily go unnoticed but really drives home the necessity to forgive. Jesus says: “After I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee”. Jesus knew his disciples would run in fear. He knew Peter would deny Him, yet Jesus said, “After this is finished, I’ll meet you in Galilee.” He forgave them and promised they’d be together again. We must do as Jesus did: offer healing and forgiveness rather than anger and revenge. Forgiveness makes us “Christ-like”. Forgiveness makes us “*Way makers, miracle workers, promise keepers, light in the darkness...*”

Finally, as followers of Jesus we are called to pray. We find Jesus going off to pray before every important event in His life. We see it again today in our readings as He prayed in the garden right before His arrest. He prayed for courage and strength. Because of His prayer, He was able to face everything that came next. Prayer guides us, focuses us, and strengthens us. Jesus showed us that we can talk to God; we have a Father who listens. Prayer makes us “Christ-like”.

Our world can be a chaotic place especially during this difficult time. Fear, anxiety, and doubt tug at us *but we are Catholics and this is Holy Week*. Let’s promise ourselves to make this week different. Rededicate ourselves to trust, forgiveness, and prayer. Let’s make this week *truly holy*. A time to see the hand of God in our lives, inviting us to an even closer relationship with His Son, our Savior, Jesus. This week *together*, let’s remember and pray:

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