

Palm Sunday

April 5, 2020

Isaiah 50:4-7
Philippians 2:6-11
Matthew 27:11-54

Here we are, standing at the beginning of Holy Week. We are also standing in the midst of a terribly difficult time where the human lives of so many are truly in question. This has brought us to our knees, begging for God's mercy. We are searching for assurance that we and what we have known will survive. It is equally important, I would say, that we ponder the value of what we have already been given.

Christ Jesus emptied his divinity into our humanity, that our humanity might be emptied into his divinity. We stand before something that is truly mysterious. As we take in all that happens in this Holy Week, we cannot fully understand and we are not meant to fully understand. Our hope is that the divinity of Christ Jesus might touch us and form humanity on a deeper level.

After the meal Jesus shared with the twelve, "He went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives." There he urged the three disciples who came to the garden with him to pray, while he went *a stone's throw away* and began to pray.

Where Jesus had only recently been transfigured in ecstasy on a mountaintop with these same three apostles, here Jesus kneels upon the earth in agony. There is indeed something very human here, something that conflicts with the third petition of the Lord's Prayer, *your will be done*. Jesus looks ahead and sees the inevitable conflict between himself and the religious and political authorities and the way these powerful forces deal with their irritations. Jesus does not want to suffer and he prays to the Father, not to let this happen. This is the prayer of any human being looking into the possibility of pain and suffering. There is no glory in suffering as such, but rather in the reason for which one would be willing to suffer.

What is significant here is that this agony should take place in a garden. In literature, a garden is not a place to simply pick vegetables. Rather, a garden is the place of delight, the place of love, the place to drink wine, the place where lovers meet in the moonlight, the place of intimacy. The garden is paradise. That is why Adam and Eve are described at the beginning of sacred scripture as being in a garden.

What we find here in the garden of Gethsemane is that Jesus *loves* something more than he *fears* suffering. Jesus is fully committed to the divine will. God's will is not that Jesus suffer and die. God's will is that the invitation to forgiveness and reconciliation take hold in our human lives. This is what Jesus has pledged to do throughout his ministry. In the events that are unfolding here, Jesus will remain steadfast to that commitment. He will never succumb to the violence of the world. Rather, Jesus will forgive his persecutors and offer paradise to the repentant thief. What gives him the ability to do this is his prayer life, his relationship with the Father. The unrelenting flow of love from God, residing deep within, will be his strength.

Jesus kneels upon the earth to be in communion with God; when he rises from the earth he rises with God's love. Unfortunately, this same strength will not be found in the disciples. They have physically fallen asleep, and thus have not stayed in touch with their own spiritual source. They shrink and have pulled back from engagement. They have only half listened to Jesus and the strength found in God's love would not be able to assist them for what would unfold. This is the very real tension for all of us, the tension between the human and divine.

This terrible pandemic has interrupted our celebration of Holy Week, the most sacred time in our church year. And yet, it might indeed be appropriate for us to humbly submit and recognize this is more of a time for prayer than ever. Through prayer we strive to rest in God, and then, what flows out of our lives will be the good that God desires for us. These days of Holy Week call us to be humble before God and to be open to what Jesus is teaching. Each day as we move through this Holy Week, I urge you to breath deeply, breath in the very presence of Jesus, and then slowly breath out anxiety and fear. Jesus will then be able to teach us what we and this world so desperately need to learn.

Presider: Let us turn our minds and hearts to the world's needs as we ask God to hear and answer our prayers. Our response: God of mercy, hear our prayer!

- 1. For an end to hatred, division, oppression, war, apathy, and greed; / for the willingness to come together, to support those who are most in need; / for courage to become a genuine human family// We pray ...**
- 2. For religious and civic leaders, / for insight and common sense, for wisdom to put the greater need of the community ahead of any personal gain or selfish ambition // We pray ...**
- 3. For freedom from anxiety and worry in these difficult times, / for those who struggle with addictive behavior, / for victims of abuse and domestic violence // We pray ...**
- 4. For those who are putting their own safety on the line to a help as first responders and health care professionals, for protection, strength, and fortitude // We pray ...**
- 5. For each citizen to fulfill their civic responsibility to neighbor and community, keeping themselves safe and preventing the spread of the Coronavirus // We pray ...**
- 6. For all those who struggle with ongoing health issues, for the institutionalized; and for the abandoned who feel depressed, afraid, suicidal and alone // We pray ...**
- 7. For those who have died, especially as a result of the Coronavirus and for those who grieve their loss // for trust in God's love and compassion // We pray ...**

The parish community would like to support you in prayer. Please share with us your needs and intentions.

God of love and mercy, you know our needs in this difficult moment. As we enter Holy Week, Help us to carry our crosses and journey with Jesus with confidence and assurance that all will be well. Amen.