

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Passion (Palm) Sunday, March 27-28, 2021, Cycle B

With Palm Sunday we mark the beginning of the holiest week of the year. Holy Days that march us into the very heart and center of our Christian liturgical year – the Easter Triduum! The Easter Triduum – three days from sundown on Holy Thursday to sundown on Easter Sunday – high holy days that bring us to the completion of our Lenten journey with Jesus - passing over from suffering and death to life that lasts forever.

This year on Palm Sunday we read Mark's version of the Passion, which stands in stark contrast to John's Passion, which we will read on Good Friday! Mark's Passion depicts a very human Jesus. In Gethsemane, Jesus falls prostrate in deep anguish. Three times he begs God to let the cup pass him by; three times his pleas are met with silence. At earlier crucial turning points in his life, Jesus experienced concrete signs of God's presence and affirmation (an overshadowing cloud and a heavenly voice at his Baptism and Transfiguration), but in Gethsemane there is only terrifying silence. Before Jesus across the Kidron Valley, rises the Temple, with its officials who want him dead. Behind him, beyond the Mount of Olives, is the Judean desert. He could yet slip away and avoid death, at least for the time being. What was God's will? Jesus finds no discernable response; all he can do is rely on his previous experiences of God's faithful love. Not knowing how God will bring the divine will for life and love to fullness through his brutal execution, Jesus chooses to remain at Gethsemane in trust.

As the Sanhedrin and Pilate interrogate Jesus, he remains mainly silent, like the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:7. Throughout his ministry, Jesus was not silent in the face of injustice; he denounced injustice and acted to rectify a broken world! Here, his refusal to engage with representatives of a corrupt system can be read as a silent protest against them.

The desolate portrait of a Jesus abandoned continues unrelieved as Mark recounts the mockery by the soldiers, the march to the place of execution, and the verbal and physical abuse at Golgotha. Jesus' final words in Mark are an anguished cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

When you think about it, the Entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem in triumph shows us the truth of whom Jesus is – The Lord of Life and Glory. But as Mark insists, Life and Glory only come through the mystery of the Cross – for all of us.

The Apostle Paul proclaims in his letter to the Philippians that God in Jesus willingly embraced our suffering humanity. Jesus did not run away from being human, he embraced frail humanity, even in death. In Jesus, God became one with us and has turned death into the door to New Life.

Remember the scene in Mark's Passion narrative when Jesus breathed his last! Mark tells us that the veil in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. What does the tearing of the Temple veil mean? Well, This Temple Veil was a thick curtain that separated the people from what was called the Holy of Holies – the most sacred room of the Temple, where God's presence dwelt. The tearing of the Temple veil is a powerful symbol stating that God has abolished the separation between Jesus and humanity. God, in Jesus, has embraced our death; and humanity in Jesus, has embraced God's eternal life. What Good news!

Holy Week, the Easter Triduum, then is not a time for sorrow nor mourning, but a time for gratitude, for joy, for hope.

So, come let us enter joyfully into the great Easter three days of the Easter Triduum rejoicing that: "We should glory in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ".