

The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday

Introduction: The Church celebrates this sixth Sunday of Lent as both Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. This is the place in the Liturgical year when the Church stops us so that we can remember and relive the events which brought about our redemption and salvation. What we commemorate and relive during this week is not just Jesus' dying and rising, but our own dying to sin and selfishness and rising in Jesus, which will result in our healing, reconciliation, and redemption. Attentive participation in the Holy Week liturgy will deepen our relationship with God, increase our Faith, and strengthen our lives as disciples of Jesus. Today's liturgy combines contrasting moments, one of glory, the other of suffering: the royal welcome of Jesus in Jerusalem, and the rigged trial, culminating in the crucifixion, death, and burial of the Christ.

Scripture lessons summarized: Today's first reading, the third of Isaiah's four Servant Songs, like the other three, foreshadows Jesus' own life and mission. The Refrain for today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 22), ***"My God, My God, why have You abandoned Me?"*** plunges us into the heart of Christ's Passion. The Second Reading, taken from Paul's letter to the Philippians, is an ancient Christian hymn representing a very early Christian understanding of who Jesus is, and of how his mission saves us from sin and death. The first part of today's Gospel describes the royal reception Jesus received from his admirers, who paraded with him for a distance of the two miles between the Mount of Olives and the city of Jerusalem. In the second part of today's Gospel, we listen to/participate in a reading of the Passion of Christ according to Matthew. We are challenged to examine our own lives in the light of some of the characters in the Passion story – like Peter who denied Jesus, Judas who betrayed Jesus, Herod who ridiculed Jesus, Pilate who acted against his conscience as he condemned Jesus to death on the cross, and the leaders of the people who preserved their position by getting rid of Jesus.

Life Messages: 1) Let us not cause Jesus to weep over us. Instead, let us repent and weep over our sins remembering the Jewish saying, "Heaven rejoices over a repentant sinner and sheds tears over a non-repentant, hardhearted one." We need to imitate the prodigal son and return to God, our loving Father through

the Sacrament of Reconciliation during this last week of Lent and participate fully in the joy of Christ's Resurrection.

2) We need to be fruit-producing, not barren, fig trees. God expects me to produce fruits of holiness, purity, justice, humility, obedience, charity, and forgiveness, instead of leading a barren spiritual life.

3) Let us not desecrate our heart and prompt Jesus to cleanse it with His whip. Jesus cannot tolerate the desecration of our soul, the temple of the Holy Spirit by our addiction to uncharitable, unjust and impure thoughts, words, and deeds.

4) We need to welcome Jesus into our hearts in a special way during the Holy Week as his supporters did on Palm Sunday by welcoming Him into all areas of our life as our Lord and Savior, singing "Hosanna," and surrendering our lives to Jesus during this Holy Week.

5) We need to be ready to become like the humble donkey that carried Jesus. As we "carry Jesus" to the world, we may receive the same welcome that Jesus received on Palm Sunday, but we may also meet the same opposition, crosses, and trials later. Like the donkey, we are called upon to carry Christ to a world that does not know Him. Hence, let us become transparent Christians during this Holy Week, enabling others to see in us Jesus' universal love, unconditional forgiveness, and sacrificial service.

Significance of Holy Week:

1) A week of remembrance and appreciation

2) A week of thanksgiving

3) A week of repentance and reconciliation

4) A week to keep Christ's New Commandment of Agape love

5) A week to deepen our Faith and strengthen our relationship with God.

Significance of Palm Sunday:

1) A day to remember the contrasting moments of Christ's life on earth, first triumph, then tragedy.