

## Holy Week is A Time to Grow in Our Faith

Recently Apple updated their iPhone software so now my iPhone will tell me how much time I spend each week on social media or playing games on the phone. Admittedly I don't pay too much attention to the numbers. But I am on my phone quite a bit. I'll play "Words With Friends"; check the news; check social media; and put on music on the XM app while I exercise. And that's just my phone. I'm also of course spending time on my computer (like I am now as I write this column). And in terms of time spent on other things, there's thinking about the day ahead and the week, working on different tasks, and thinking about what still needs to get done. Most of us are pretty busy; we spend so much time on work, school, family activities, and are going, going, going. Perhaps at some point the iPhone will tell me about these other things too, and I imagine it'll be a lot of time spent on them.

My iPhone though does not tell me how much time I spend on my faith each week, nor does it tell me how much time I spend thinking about God and my relationship with Him. If our phones did that though, what would it say about that part of our lives? How would it compare to all the other things we do?

We do have to be engaged in the world and stay busy. But we also need to think back to Ash Wednesday: from dust you came, to dust you shall return. That is a reality. But it is a reality changed by God's love, and what Jesus has done for us. And this week gives us the chance to think more deeply about the greatest love story ever told, Christ's Passover from death to life. We think about God's love for us, but also of how we need to respond to that love and maybe not think as much about the next day, but about eternity. Where is our life headed? What are we prepping for? Are we ready for the time, as Johnny Cash would say, the Man will come around, meaning our judgment day?

As we ponder these things we should not be filled with fear, but with hope, love and a desire to look to Jesus and learn from Him about how to grow closer to Him, and bring His love into the world. Holy Week gives us the perfect opportunity to do just that.

What I've found is that each of the liturgies can have a different way of helping me to grow in my faith. And I hope you'd think about that as you prepare to celebrate this most solemn week on our calendar.

We begin today on Palm Sunday, and what strikes me with the day is the shallowness of people. Many of us been burned by fake people in our lives; but let's be honest, sometimes we have done that to other people. You have the crowds who say "hosanna!" but then drop the palms and walk away quickly when they realize Jesus is not going to be a political leader. You have jealousy from the Sanhedrin and those who see Jesus as a threat to their power. You have the cowardice of Pilate who knows the right thing to do but doesn't do it, even when God is literally staring him in the face. You have Judas pretending to be loyal but betraying his friend with a kiss. This liturgy challenges us in a way to think about how serious we are about the word "love" (more

on that on Good Friday). Do we really mean that word when we say it, or only when it is convenient?

Holy Thursday gives us a lot to think about too. There is the institution of the Eucharist, God's gift of love to us when we celebrate at every Mass. There is the institution of the priesthood which makes it a special day for thinking about my ordination and how I live out my vocation. But what I've always been struck by is the washing of the feet. We do this as a reminder of what Jesus did, but what I love with this ritual is that it's a visible thing we do at liturgy to basically say "OK people, if you are going to receive Jesus in Holy Communion, and say I am a Christian, here's what it means." We can grow closer to God by coming to Mass. That's a big part of it. There is a lot of beauty in liturgy. A good liturgy can bring us higher and touch the soul. And I have to tell you, I really love how we celebrate liturgy here at Saint Joseph's - Bill Bradly who directs music and worship does an amazing job at helping people move closer to God through worship. But liturgy always has to connect us to the greater community. Remember the words of Pope Francis, that the Church is a field hospital. So as we see the feet being washed, it helps us think about who's feet we need to wash. Who might be hurting in our lives; who we might be neglecting; or who might be hurting. Jesus even washes the feet of Judas. Some people in our lives are lovable. Some people are challenging. We can't just serve or love when it is convenient - what Jesus does is give us a mandate to do for others what He the master has done for the 12. That's something that we need to live out daily.

What strikes me with Good Friday is the greatest love story ever told. How Jesus would do this for me, even if I were the only person ever created. How I do not deserve mercy, but am given mercy by a God who is love. How I also suffer loss in my life losing people I care about and experiencing pain, but that God suffers too with me. Yes, we are sinners and do evil things. Yes, we suffer so much in this life. But we are loved - and this is how far God goes for us out of love. Think about that on Good Friday as you touch the cross and reflect on the Passion again. Turn your sins and struggles over to the one who is love itself and let that liberate you.

Lastly, Holy Saturday. If you have never been to the Easter Vigil, do consider going. Yes, it's longer, but it's worth it. It's so amazing to see the light dispelling the darkness as the Easter fire is lit; the new Easter candle blessed and all the candles being lit from that candle; people entering into the Catholic Church and affirming their faith after studying it; and the "Alleluia" sung again. We are reminded of God having the last word over death and of our redemption. It fills one with hope, and when you hear the "Exultet" chanted, and the Litany of Saints prayed for the newly baptized and confirmed, you are overwhelmed with this sense of God's love and the power of the love that exists in the body of believers, the Church.

So much more could be said about Holy Week, but I'll just close with this: go to the liturgies. They are not obligatory holy days, but as you experience the liturgies this week, my guess is that you truly will grow in your faith and be touched by the love and grace of God.

Have a blessed Holy Week!

Fr. Paul