

Palm Sunday and the Total Commitment of our Faith

Jesus arrives in Jerusalem today a very popular person. He is welcomed as people sing “Hosanna” and wave branches in front of Him as a sign of respect. This is the one who will liberate us; this is the one who will overthrow the Romans. But then when that doesn’t happen, and He gets arrested and brought before Pilate, those same people see Him as a failure, and quickly drop their branches.

We humans can relate to this in how we can try one thing and move away when it’s tough. Someone takes up golf but finds it’s hard work to get that white ball to go straight, so the clubs get put in the garage. A person makes a New Year’s resolution to go to the gym, but then sees it’s cold outside and, not losing weight after just a week, gives up for it’s easier to revert to old ways. It’s OK to give up on golf, and one need not have a gym membership to get into the Kingdom of Heaven, but how easy it can be to give up on Christ. To say “I’m spiritual but not religious,” and put religion on the back burner. To put off prayer; to say “next week I’ll go to Mass.” Or to leave faith at the church door as what we do for an hour on Sunday, and forget those words Jesus tells us to do onto others as we would do onto Him as the week goes by.

Today, as we celebrate Palm Sunday and the start of Holy Week, we are invited to once again do soul searching, and ask ourselves does this matter – this being our faith. Do we take seriously the fact that we said “yes” to follow Christ? Or do we drop the branches when the going gets tough? This, like Lent, should not be a week of guilt, but rather a week of spiritual renewal, where we ponder what Jesus did for us, and strive to follow Him better by turning up the heat on our faith, so that we celebrate with Easter by bringing the joy of that day to the people in our lives.

We will have several beautiful liturgies I’d invite you to be a part of this week. The first, Holy Thursday, commemorates the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist and priesthood. Communion for us can be mechanical, but this is Jesus Himself coming to dwell in us, and such a precious gift of God giving us strength. The Liturgy stresses God’s gift to us of His Body in the Eucharist which is a reminder that He is always with us, but also a special reminder of how we must see Jesus in one another and love and serve one another, which the washing of the feet calls to mind.

Good Friday is the only day of the year where no priest may offer a Mass. Instead we have a service commemorating the Passion, with a reading of Saint John’s version of it and a very prayerful experience. This powerful liturgy is one of contemplation where we again reflect on how deeply God loves us and how far He goes for us to show us of this love. We also have the special intentions on Good Friday which I always find impactful; we pray for people from all walks of life (such as those of different faiths, those who may be away from the Church, for those in public office. In our polarized times, I think these intentions are really important as a reminder Christ loves and died for all people, not just those who think like we do. It’s a powerful

liturgy reminding us of the mercy we are given, but also the mercy we are called to pass on to all God's people.

Holy Saturday brings our Easter celebration, where we light the fire symbolizing the light of Christ dispelling darkness and celebrate the risen Christ. We also welcome the new candidates who will be confirmed this night, celebrating with them. This is my favorite liturgy of the year, because it is so powerful. The light of fire reminding us of love and mercy having the last word over sin and death. The hundreds of lit candles from the Easter Fire signifying how we are together the body of Christ, called to radiate the love of God. The readings of salvation history. The joy of the RCIA people who celebrate the sacraments for the first time and are received into the Church. If you haven't experienced it I hope you'll consider coming.

All three liturgies form the "Triduum," essentially three parts of one liturgy, and I'd encourage you to come to all three if you can. Of course Easter Sunday has its own beauty as well, and we will have 2 Masses that day 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.

Have a blessed Holy Week, and as we enter into this solemn week, may we think about how deeply God loves us, but also how we should respond to that love as a way of life, coming to know God more deeply each and every day, and doing all we can to help one another in the world see and experience this incredible love.

God's Blessings to you,

Fr. Paul