

**Sunday, April 9, 2017**

**Palm Sunday**

## **Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion**

### **Mass Readings:**

**1st Reading:** Isaiah 50:4-7

**2nd Reading:** Philippians 2:6-11

**Responsorial:** Psalm 22:8-9, 17-20, 23-24

**Gospel:** Matthew 26:14–27:66 (or Matthew 27:11-54)

## **Deepening Our Faith in the Triumph of the Cross**

*Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit. (Matthew 27:50)*

Saints like Ignatius Loyola and Teresa of Ávila have taught that using our imagination in prayer can help us to grow in our faith. So let's take their advice today as we read the passion of our Lord.

First, picture yourself with Jesus as he is arrested and brought before the chief priests. Listen as they level false charges against him. See him mourn over the way these men are bound in anger and hatred toward him.

Next, picture Jesus being humiliated by the soldiers. Watch as they spit upon him, mock him, and beat him. The challenge to hold his peace is overwhelming, but Jesus remains resolute and focused on his mission.

Now picture him at Calvary. He is exhausted. His body is wracked with pain and weariness. Nails have pierced his hands and feet. The pain sears through his body as the soldiers raise the cross. The suffering is enormous as the crowd continues to jeer and hurl accusations against him. Nonetheless, Jesus looks at us with compassion, understanding, and mercy. He will not accuse! He will not condemn! All he wants is our salvation.

Watching Jesus as he nears the end, you hear him speak to one of the thieves crucified with him. You think to yourself, "Even now he is still leading people to his Father!" Finally, you hear him cry out in a loud voice as he hands over his spirit—for you.

These are only a few of the events that encompass Jesus' passion. Try to read and reflect on these scenes, or choose some other scenes from today's Gospel: the Last Supper, Jesus' agony in the garden, or Peter's denial. Contemplate the passion story today. Let it move you to treasure Jesus above all others. This is the greatest story ever told.

*"Jesus, I am overwhelmed by the love you poured out for me in your passion and death. Thank you, Lord."*

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**Questions for Reflection or Discussion:**

1. The first reading from Isaiah is a powerful prophecy on Jesus' faithfulness, obedience, and his passion. It graphically describes his passion with these words: "I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting."
  - Knowing these words graphically describe what Jesus had to endure for your sins, what should be our response to this great act of love? How does it affect how you live your life? How should it?
2. The first reading ends with these words: "The Lord God is my help, therefore, I am not disgraced. I have set my face like flint, knowing that I will not be put to shame."
  - In what way are these words a testimony to Jesus' total trust in the Father's love and call for his life in the midst of his trials, especially through his passion and death on the Cross?
  - When you are in the midst of difficult circumstances, or suffering, in what ways do these words from the psalm apply to you?
  - Do you believe that, "The Lord God is my help, therefore, I am not disgraced?"
  - Are you able to say, "I have set my face like flint, knowing that I will not be put to shame"? When was this true and when was it a struggle for you?
3. The responsorial psalm is also a powerful prophetic word on Jesus' suffering, his death on the Cross, and his resurrection. The response we say at Mass is the opening words of the psalm and the words that Jesus cried out from the Cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
  - Why do you think Jesus cried out these words from the Cross?
  - In what ways do these words demonstrate how Jesus took upon himself the penalty for our sins?
  - Was there ever a time when you felt this way as well? Why?
4. The second reading provides a wonderful witness to Jesus' divinity. It is also a testimony to his humility in that he "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" and "humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."
  - If humility includes lifting others above yourself, and pride is lifting yourself above others, how do these words from the second reading demonstrate Jesus' humility?
  - How do you rate yourself on these characteristics of humility?
  - What steps can you take to reflect more and more the humility of Jesus?
5. The Gospel reading provides us with a narrative of Jesus' passion and death on the Cross. It is so easy to take for granted this familiar story, or passively listen as the Gospel is read at Mass.
  - During this grace-filled season, how can you go deeper in understanding Jesus passion and death?
  - At Mass, what can you do so you don't "passively listen as the Gospel is read"?
6. The meditation, describes some ways to use your imagination to enter into events that took place during the passion and death of Jesus. It ends with these words: "These are only a few of the events that encompass Jesus' passion. Try to read and reflect on these scenes, or choose some other scenes from today's Gospel: the Last Supper, Jesus' agony in the garden, or Peter's denial. Contemplate the passion story today. Let it move you to treasure Jesus above all others. This is the greatest story ever told."
  - During Holy week, what steps can you take to spend additional time with Jesus -- watching with him, praying with him, and meditating on his journey to the cross?
7. Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord for the victory he won for you through his passion and death, and for his great love in redeeming you and rescuing you from the power of sin and death. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

***"Jesus, I am overwhelmed by the love you poured out for me in your passion and death. Thank you, Lord."***

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is in partner relations for **The Word Among Us Partners**, (<http://www.waupartners.org/>); a ministry of **The Word Among Us** ([www.wau.org](http://www.wau.org)) to the military, prisoners, women with crisis pregnancies or who have had abortions, and college students. He is also

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