

Sunday, March 25, 2018

Palm Sunday

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

Procession Gospel: Mark 11:1-10

1st Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7

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

2nd Reading

Philippians 2:6-11

Gospel:

Mark 14:1-15:47

Palm Sunday, A Day to Fix our Eyes on Jesus and His Death on the Cross

Not . . . something to be grasped. (Philippians 2:6)

Today is one of the most important days of the year. It's a day to fix our eyes on Jesus and watch him empty himself on a cross—for us and for our salvation. It's a day to honor the One whose entire life was one of giving, not grasping, one of healing and restoration, not division and rivalry. It's a day to praise Jesus for overcoming sin and death through his act of pure, sacrificial love.

By his humility and obedience, Jesus has undone Adam's prideful attempt to become God—and every attempt that all of Adam's children have made ever since. He has shown that the way to heaven is not by grasping for ourselves and striving against one another. It's not something we earn, and it's not a kingdom we conquer. No, Jesus' death on the cross proves that the way to heaven is one of receiving graciously instead of possessing selfishly.

This can sound so grandiose and heroic that we might think it's out of our reach. But nothing can be further from the truth. God sees every act of self-sacrifice, every decision to put someone else's needs ahead of ours, every decision to empty ourselves. When we give up time to help our child with yet another math problem, God sees it. When we listen carefully to a spouse who tells us about her difficult day at work, even if ours was no better, God sees it. When we put down our car window and offer some food or money to a homeless person, God sees it. He sees them all, and he rewards them.

Every single act of self-giving is a reflection of the cross. And because of that, every act of self-giving warms our Father's heart and moves him to raise us up a little bit more—just as he did for Jesus.

So fix your eyes on Jesus today, and let his self-giving love move you to be more like him.

“Thank you, Jesus, for your cross! Lord, teach me to follow your path of love.”

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission. For more information on how to subscribe to their magazine, go to www.wau.org).

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. Palm Sunday mass begins by recalling in the Procession reading, Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem and the crowd's reaction: "Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. Those preceding him as well as those following kept crying out: 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is to come! Hosanna in the highest!'"
 - How is Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem a "sign of contradiction" for the events that followed?
 - In what ways can Jesus be a sign of contradiction in your own lives: acclaimed at times, ignored at other times, and even doubted during times of suffering?
2. In the first reading, we begin to get a vivid glimpse of what Jesus suffered for us in his passion: "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." Yet the reading ends with these words of hope and trust in the Lord: "The Lord GOD is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame."
 - In light of what it must have been like for the Son of God to have been beaten, have his beard plucked, and be buffeted and spit at for you, what are some steps you can take to enter more deeply into the Holy Week events?
 - How can you apply the ending words of the reading to your own life during difficult times?
3. In the responsorial Psalm, we also get a prophetic description of Jesus' passion, as well as his crucifixion. Like the first reading, the responsorial psalm also ends with words of hope and trust in the Lord: "But you, O LORD, be not far from me; O my help, hasten to aid me. I will proclaim your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise you: 'You who fear the LORD, praise him; all you descendants of Jacob, give glory to him; revere him.'"
 - Out of gratitude for what the Lord suffered for you, what are some ways you can "keep watch" with Jesus through his Holy Week of suffering and death on the cross?
 - What do the ending words of the psalm mean to you? In what way can they be applied to your life?
4. In the second reading we learn that Christ "emptied himself" and "humbled himself" when he became man: "becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." The reading ends with these words: "Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."
 - In what ways, do the opening verses of the reading demonstrate the humility of Jesus?
 - How about you? How do you react when you have been humbled or criticized or even rejected?
 - What is your understanding of these ending words of the reading: "at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"? How do they apply to us as Catholic Christians?
5. The Gospel reading describes Jesus' fulfillment of what was prophesied in the first two readings regarding his passion and death. There are many "contrasts" in St. Mark's description of the Passover celebration, the last supper, and his passion and crucifixion. It also describes the profession of faith by the gentile Roman centurion at the cross: "Truly this man was the Son of God."
 - How would you describe the many contrasts in the Gospel reading? How would you describe the contrasts in your life? Which ones need more of the Lord's grace to overcome them?
 - What do you think led the Roman centurion to see Jesus' divinity in his passion and death?
 - In what ways do you see Jesus' divinity in his passion and death, as described in the Gospel reading?
6. The meditation ends with these words: "Every single act of self-giving is a reflection of the cross. And because of that, every act of self-giving warms our Father's heart and moves him to raise us up a little bit more—just as he did for Jesus. So fix your eyes on Jesus today, and let his self-giving love move you to be more like him."
 - As you contemplate the Passion and open yourself more to God's grace during this grace-filled season, what steps can you take, especially in your prayers and at Mass, to "fix your eyes on Jesus today, and let his self-giving love move you to be more like him"?
7. Take some time now to pray and thank Jesus for dying on the cross for your sins and ask him for the grace to follow, in a deeper way, his example of self-sacrifice and love. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

As posted on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal National Service Committee's website: www.nsc-chariscenter.org

“Thank you, Jesus, for your cross! Lord, teach me to follow your path of love.”

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the **ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization** (www.christlife.org/) and a member of the **National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal** (www.nsc-chariscenter.org). Maurice was also the founding executive director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men** and a former chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org). He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]