

Sunday, April 5, 2020

Palm Sunday

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

Procession Gospel: Matthew 21:1-11

1st Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7

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

2nd Reading: Philippians 2:6-11

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

Hearing Jesus' Voice to "Come Out" of Our Tomb of Sin and Come to Him

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. (Matthew 21:9)

Today we join the crowd on the road to Jerusalem. We watch as they spread their coats and palm branches before Jesus, the humble king of Israel. We hold our own palms high and cry "Hosanna!" to welcome our coming king.

And today Jesus comes, not clothed in regal robes or seated on a magnificent stallion, but riding on a lowly donkey. He enters Jerusalem and enters our hearts, not as a warrior, but as a servant king. He comes bringing peace, as a Messiah who will lay down his life for his people.

We know the answer to the question posed by the people of Jerusalem: "Who is this?" (Matthew 21:10). We know that Jesus is more than a prophet, more than a brilliant teacher, more than a miracle worker. We know that he is the Son of God and our Lord. In the words of St. Andrew of Crete, monk, bishop, and hymn writer from the seventh and eighth centuries,

Let us go together to meet Christ on the Mount of Olives. . . . Let us run to accompany him as he hastens toward his passion, and imitate those who met him then, not by covering his path with garments, olive branches or palms, but by doing all we can to prostrate ourselves before him by being humble and by trying to live as he would wish. . . . Let us spread before his feet, not garments or soulless olive branches, which delight the eye for a few hours and then wither, but ourselves. (Sermon for Palm Sunday, Oratio 9)

During this holiest of weeks, let's thank Jesus for his passion and death. Let's lay down our lives like palms at his feet, in humble obedience. Let's adore him with songs of praise for his mercy.

"Blessed are you, Jesus! You have come to set us free."

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

Sunday, April 5, 2020

Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. The first reading from Isaiah opens with these words: *The Lord GOD has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them. Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear; and I have not rebelled, have not turned back. 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.* It 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 shall not be put to shame.*
 - In what ways are the opening words a powerful prophecy on Jesus' passion and his trust in the Father's love?
 - How should we respond to Jesus' great act of love? How does it affect how you live your life? How should it?
 - When you are in the midst of difficult circumstances, or suffering, are you able to say, *I have set my face like flint, knowing that I will not be put to shame?* Do you believe that, *The Lord God is my help, therefore, I am not disgraced?* When was this true and when was it a struggle for you?
2. The responsorial psalm begins with these words: *All who see me scoff at me; they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads: "He relied on the LORD; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, if he loves him." ... They have pierced my hands and my feet; I can count all my bones. They divide my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots. 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.*
 - In what ways is the responsorial psalm also a powerful prophetic word on Jesus' suffering, his death on the Cross, and his resurrection?
 - What is the importance of knowing that almost every aspect of Jesus' life, including his virgin birth, mission, death on the cross, and resurrection is prophesied in the Old Testament? Is it important to you?
3. The second reading opens with these words: *Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* It closes 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.*
 - This reading provides a wonderful witness to Jesus' divinity and exaltation, as well as his humility. Why do you think St. Paul contrasts these truths? In what way are they related?
 - How do you rate yourself on Jesus' attributes of humility? What can you do to reflect more of his humility?
4. The Gospel reading provides us with a narrative of Jesus' passion and death on the Cross. Here are some of the words that Jesus spoke: *My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will. yet, not as I will, but as you will. All this has come to pass that the writings of the prophets may be fulfilled. From now on you will see 'the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power' and 'coming on the clouds of heaven.' My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*
 - Take some time to reflect on each of the above words of Jesus from his passion and death. What do these words convey to you? What impact do they have on you?
 - Why do you think Jesus cried out the words above from the Cross? In what ways, do they give us a glimpse of what he saved us from by his death, that is, how Jesus took upon himself the penalty for our sins?
5. The meditation is from the Gospel reading used in the Palm Sunday Procession. It begins with these words: "Today we join the crowd on the road to Jerusalem. We watch as they spread their coats and palm branches before Jesus, the humble king of Israel. We hold our own palms high and cry "Hosanna!" to welcome our coming king. It ends with these words: "During this holiest of weeks, let's thank Jesus for his passion and death. Let's lay down our lives like palms at his feet, in humble obedience. Let's adore him with songs of praise for his mercy."
 - What are some ways you can use your imagination to enter into events that took place during Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, or enter into some other scenes from the Gospel reading?
 - During Holy week, what steps can you take to spend additional time with Jesus -- watching with him, praying with him, meditating on his journey to the cross, and going deeper in understanding Jesus passion and death?

Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord for setting us free from the power of sin and death through his passion and death. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

"Blessed are you, Jesus! You have come to set us free."

[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), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]