

Palmarum
25 March, Anno Domini 2018
St. Matthew 27:11-54
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Today marks the beginning of our yearly entrance into the Holy of Holies. In our modern society of egalitarianism where everything and everyone is completely the same, at least as much as we can pretend them to be, it is as though we have become immune and even adverse to anything that is different or set aside. There is a striving to make everything ordinary and mundane. The world seeks to strip everything of depth and meaning because it is lazy and special things demand special work and attention. I pray that it will not be so among us this Holy Week. Rather, may the Holy Spirit draw our eyes and our hearts to what is truly the most significant and life-changing event of all human history - the death of God's only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world...for your sins.

Of course, this week is not holy because we make it so by our devotions but because of the incomprehensible salvation worked for humanity by God. Of course, we aren't simply putting on a play. We aren't trying to work up some kind of false sadness to the death of Jesus and an equally false sense of surprise and joy Easter morning as though we are shocked at how it all played out. Rather, it is with great and solemn joy that we hear again, in the greatest detail several times this week, about all that took place over the course of that week that began with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the back of a lowly donkey. We move from the elation of the waving palm branches and ringing hosannas to ugliness of sinful humanity which is so lost in its own sin that it would rather drive nails through the hands and feet of the Lord of Life than be saved from death.

It has saddened me over the years to see fewer and fewer of God's children set aside time this week to ponder what God has done. I, too, have fallen prey to the world's meaningless business. Many of us have lamented together that Lent has flown by too quickly and that we haven't really had time to focus. That's just a lie we tell ourselves to excuse ourselves. The truth is that we don't make the time. Our worship and prayers have faltered. Our plans of fasting have fallen short. We have seen again the weakness of our flesh. It's too hard and inconvenient. There are too many fun and pleasurable things we would have to set aside to join the crowds as they welcomed Jesus

and to follow with our Lord as He ascends Golgotha and is nailed too the cross. We have allowed our hearts to grow cold to our great need for salvation and so also the great magnitude of what Christ suffered during these days for us in order to overcome death and the grave.

But, then again, this week, like every other week, isn't about what you or I do. It is about what Jesus did for us during Holy Week. It is about what Jesus continues to do for us today because of Holy Week. It is the death of Jesus that makes it holy. It is holy because time that otherwise sinful man uses for unholy, ungodly, unprofitable things has been sanctified by the Holy One who created time. He who exists apart from time, who has no beginning or end, who has always, since eternity been with God, has entered time, not out of curiosity, but so that we who do have beginnings would not spend our eternal end in the fires of judgment and torment.

All our weeks, whether we acknowledge it or not, are lived in light of Holy Week, in light of the death of God's Son and His resurrection on the third day. From His holy incarnation; to His holy nativity; to His baptism, fasting, and temptation; to His agony and bloody sweat; to His cross and passion; to His precious death and burial; to His glorious resurrection and ascension; to the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter - all of time now passes and takes its meaning from Christ. Every hour of Jesus' life was spent redeeming and sanctifying what man had made evil and used only for evil. Every day of our lives is lived in the light of the cross and empty tomb of Christ. We who still must bear this sinful flesh during the days of our earthly life, live in the daily cycle of Good Friday and Easter, the cycle of death and resurrection, the cycle of repentance and forgiveness. This is the whole life of the Christian Church as we confess in the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed: "In this Christian Church, He (the Holy Spirit) daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers." "For we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment."

What we slow down to give special attention to this week, as I strongly urge you to do and pray that you would, is the life that you have been freely given in Christ and the culmination and center of all human history. The passion of Christ is the climactic moment when the ancient serpent's head is finally and eternally crushed, and when the death which plagues all of creation is finally swallowed up in the death of our Lord and Savior. Without Good Friday, you and I and all people would be void of all hope and the only certainty we would have is that we would spend all of eternity receiving the just punishment for all of our sins.

Instead, dear Christian, having been baptized into Good Friday, baptized into Christ's death, you may be filled with hope and joy because now what is certain, what is promised to you by God the Father, is that there is no longer any condemnation for you in Christ. Your eternity will be filled with shouts of rejoicing and praise because your sin and your death have been destroyed as you have also been baptized into Easter. You live in the light that streams out of the darkness of Good Friday. You may suffer hardship, disease, sadness, and loss. But you will rejoice and even now, even in the midst of all that, you have every reason to rejoice because all of those things have been overcome as surely as Christ Jesus has risen from the dead.

You don't need to try to return to the cross by way of a contrived emotional experience. The cross, the Body, the Blood come to you as the Words of Jesus continue to echo through time - "Take, eat; Take, drink. Here I give to you today the full blessing of my death 2000 years ago. The cross, the tomb, the donkey, the scourge and the thorns - they are long gone. Don't look for them. Holy Communion. This is how you will remember me. I died that you might have this food of My Body and My Blood as a constant testament to your salvation." This is how the cross is still a reality today. You don't go to Jesus. He comes to you and blesses you with life and forgiveness. He comes speaking those peace-giving words "It is finished." Your salvation is completely accomplished for you. That is just as true today as it was when Jesus died.

Thus in the midst of our solemn observance of Jesus' passion we still rejoice. We rejoice because we know how it ends! We know the outcome. We are living in the outcome. It is a daily reality filled with fresh joy and strength. And it is a promise that one day, when our Lord draws time to a close, we will see with our eyes all that we have heard with our ears and we will no longer live by faith. We will know perfectly what we know see dimly, as in a mirror.

So let us go this week with the crowds. Let us hear again of all that was done for us. Let us set aside time each day this week to hear again and again of our Lord's unyielding love for us, love that drove Him to Golgotha. Let us slow down and give our full attention to the only thing that actually matters - the Lamb of God, going silently forth bearing our sins in His innocent flesh and dying the death of wretched sinners so that wretched sinners might be set free. Let us stand at the foot of the cross and with the centurion gladly declare before the whole world and before Satan himself "Truly this man was the Son of God" and He died to save you.

In the Name of Jesus.