

## Some words for Palm Sunday

Readings    Matthew 21:1-11  
Isaiah 50:4-7  
Psalm 21 (22): 8-9, 17-20, 23-24  
Philippians 2:6-11  
Matthew 26:14 to 27:66 (or Matthew 27:11-54)

Dear Parishioners of St Joseph's & St Charles,

The words of St Alphonsus Ligouri in his meditation on the Fourth Station, of his *Stations of Cross*, where '*Jesus Meets His Blessed Mother*,' have kept coming to my mind this past week: '*Consider the meeting of the Son and the Mother, which took place on this journey. Jesus and Mary looked at each other, and their looks became as so many arrows to wound those hearts which loved each other so tenderly.*'

In the grip of this awful pandemic how many around the world I wonder have been wrestling with their memories of that final moment when they last saw their loved one before they died? I suspect nearly all felt the wretched state of helplessness. Forbidden to be in the presence of a loved one, especially at the hour of death, how many are left to recall that last, wordless look, when eyes met and faces communicated? Did they know hope I wonder? Hope that they would meet again, that all would be well? Or was it pain or sorrow, or regret or relief, or gratitude and love? We can be certain that it hurt, for how deep are the wounds that penetrate the human heart.

If the denial of communication and intimacy at the hour of death is the worst of it, we have nonetheless surely all experienced, in some way, what Jesus and Mary must have felt these past few days? Suddenly, we are restrained from reaching out to another and we find instead that we can no longer be with whom we chose to be, at a time or place of our choosing. There is distance between us. What is particularly distressing for practising Catholics is that it is Holy Week and we cannot go to church and 'do this in memory of me.'<sup>1</sup> We didn't even get chance to sing our '*Hosanna to the son of David!*'<sup>2</sup> before we were dispersed.

How then, given our present constraints, might we observe Holy Week? The liturgy of the Great Week typically takes us on an intense, emotional journey wherein '*we*

gather together to herald with the whole Church<sup>3</sup> the unfolding drama of 'the Lord's Paschal Mystery, that is to say, of his Passion and Resurrection.'<sup>4</sup> First we come to acclaim 'him who comes in the name of the Lord!'<sup>3</sup> then, as the week progresses, we witness his betrayal with a kiss for, 'Someone who has dipped his hand into the dish with me, will betray me.'<sup>6</sup> However, in the midst of this shocking revelation we will recall even to this day, that on the night he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and then he took a cup and said 'Take it and eat; ... Drink all of you from this.'<sup>7</sup> These are not moments of isolation, they are intense expressions of our solidarity, of our communion. We are one Body. We understand this, on Holy Thursday we witness the Washing of Feet, and recognise that our worship calls us to serve and that by our service we will give glory to God.

With pomp and ceremony we carry our Eucharistic Lord to our Altar of Repose and we may, like the disciples, watch with him awhile before, finally, we see him taken away like a thief in the night, 'Am I a brigand?'<sup>8</sup> The following day, Good Friday, finds us hearing of the trial of Jesus, of his mockery and torture. Like Mary and the young disciple John, we too will have to walk the *via dolorosa* and accompany our Lord to the foot of the Cross. In our case, perhaps better than them, we can reach out to the Cross and touch it and kiss it. The moment of his death sees us drop silently to our knees for 'he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross,'<sup>9</sup> and, moved by his universal death for all, we pray for the whole world and all its needs.

'O Lord, do not leave me alone, my strength, make haste to help me!'<sup>10</sup> Having left in silence all we can now do is watch and wait, 'like the watchman for the daybreak,'<sup>11</sup> at the tomb of the Lord Jesus.

Having waited all day 'In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,'<sup>12</sup> we behold, in the darkness of Holy Saturday night, the light and life of Christ Jesus, and Our Risen Lord is suddenly amongst us. In fire and light, with word and water, we complete the cycle of Easter and the Good News of the Resurrection is proclaimed: *Christ our light!*

'For it was to accomplish this mystery that he entered his own city of Jerusalem. Therefore, with all faith and devotion, let us commemorate ... that, being made by his grace partakers of the Cross, we may have a share also in his Resurrection and in his life.'<sup>14</sup>

These essential rites and rhythms will be sorely missed. Yes, we know however dim, that the public light of our faith will be kept burning and the torch will be passed. Yet, even for we priests, tasked by virtue of the sacrament of order and ministerial

office to celebrate these mysteries on behalf of all, there will, inevitably, feel something lacking. However, this is the cup from which we all must drink and with humility pray, *'let it be as you, not I, would have it.'*<sup>13</sup> For, the bitter gall and spiritual vinegar that appear to be our lot are in fact a source of true spiritual treasure. The grace of docility and humility - to do what has been asked of us - and the life-giving sacrifice that we must make for the Common Good is our observance this year of Holy Week. That some lives will be saved by our actions seems clear (though it is not for us to know their name or number) and this should hearten and encourage us. Life, not death, is the glory of our faith. This is the thanksgiving sacrifice we are called upon to make.

As we accompany our Saviour this week let us recall the words of St Alphonsus at the Tenth Station of the Cross: for, when *'Jesus is Stripped of His Garments,'* he prays *'Compassionate your Saviour thus cruelly treated.'* True Christian compassion – from the Latin *'to suffer with'* - sees us, when powerless and unable to do anything else, nevertheless open our hearts and minds to the suffering of others. *'Moved by so much suffering Christ not only allows himself to be touched by the sick, but he makes their miseries his own: "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases."*<sup>15</sup>

As we contemplate our social and liturgical isolation let us recall that unlike even Mary, most Blessed Virgin and Mother, we now know, in the light of the resurrection, that we can *never* be parted from our Saviour. Despite her privileged position and unique role in the history of our salvation, as Mary beheld the death of her beloved Son she did not know the future for it had not yet been revealed. All she had was her faith and trust in Him.

Mary's faith was abiding, present not only in the good times when Jesus performed miracles and the crowds flocked to him but it was there in the ordinary and humdrum too. Few were left with her when it came to the bad times, when she stood at the foot of the Cross. The same faith that was required of her as she faced the angel Gabriel was asked of her now also. We too are called to make the same act of faith and trust in the Lord. Inspired by the example of Mary, let us abide with her Son upon the cross and pray, *'And thou, my Queen, who wast overwhelmed with sorrow, obtain for me by thy intercession a continual and tender remembrance of the Passion of thy Son.'*<sup>16</sup>

*'So too I set my face like flint: I know I shall not be shamed.'*<sup>17</sup>

Our Lady of Walsingham, *pray for us.*

St Joseph, *pray for us.*

St Charles Borromeo, *pray for us.*

With my prayers,

Rev. Mark McManus

Parish Priest

Sunday 5 April 2020

Palm Sunday

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1. Luke 22:19
  2. Matthew 21:9
  3. *The Commemoration of the Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem, Introduction, Roman Missal*
  4. Ibid
  5. Matthew 21:9
  6. Matthew 26:23
  7. Matthew 26:26-28
  8. Matthew 26:55
  9. Philippians 2:8
  10. Psalm 21 (22): 19-20,
  11. Psalm 129 (130): 6
  12. 1 Corinthians 15: 52
  13. Matthew 26: 39
  14. *The Commemoration of the Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem, loc. cit.*
  15. Catechism of the Catholic Church ccc. 1505
  16. *Stations of the Cross, St Alphonsus Ligouri, d.1787*
  17. Isaiah 50:7