

“...being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2.8)

Dear friends, today begins the most sacred time of our year. Our Holy Week, which we recall year after year, serves to remind us of the drama of our Lord's Passion and the events that led us to the Cross – which is the place of our Salvation. While we approach the Cross with sorrow for the death which happened there, our celebration today and that on Easter will remind us that the Cross is the place of triumph. Through the death of our Lord, new life is founded for us all. But it was indeed a sorrowful event that took place. For Jesus suffered public humiliation and much pain to achieve this goal. Today begins in earnest our journey alongside Jesus to that dark day when the light of the world was snuffed out.

The events of Jesus' passion which we recall this week were deeply troubling for his followers. On this day which we commemorate with palms and processions, a prophecy was being fulfilled. The prophecy which Jesus retold to his disciples was the same we read from the prophet Zechariah. It is a prophecy of the Messiah who would come as the king of peace: the powerful ruler who would save the people of Judea from their oppression. It was he who they expected to conquer the Romans and establish a new kingdom – God's Kingdom. And, in order to make peace, there is often associated expectation of a battle. So, this new ruler riding on a donkey would have been expected to bring with him an army to defeat the enemy. This, as we know, was not the case in a physical sense, though we do know that he was a king who came to make war against the forces of sin and death.

But the prophecy from Zechariah was as challenging as it was symbolic. Though it was symbolic to those who knew that Jesus was claiming to be a king, the use of a donkey by a king was not a symbol of power. It was a paradox of sorts, that the king who was to bring peace to the land would enter on a beast of burden, rather than a strong horse and chariot – a symbol of power. But our Lord's humility served to further solidify his position as a peaceful ruler – a ruler who was not of this world.

This humility will be on full display for us all week. For the next six days, we are reading accounts of our Lord's passion each day that remind about his harrowing journey from the night of his arrest to his death upon the cross he carried through the city. As the thief on the cross and the soldiers say, if Jesus was who he said he was, he could have made this all stop. Just like the devil tempting Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus could have been tempted to make it all go away. But he didn't. Instead, he let it happen so that God's ultimate plan might come true. He submitted to the death of the cross as the perfect sacrifice for our sins so that he could be the atonement for all time. Jesus the king, the Messiah, was mocked, beaten, and killed. It was not only humble, it was humiliating. And it was all done out of love.

The Epistle today is a beautiful passage of poetry in Paul's Epistle to the Philippians which some scholars regard as a praise hymn to Christ. You can see why when you read the whole of it: it summarizes, rather succinctly, the thesis of Paul's theology. Christ lowered himself to join our human estate so that he might be raised up high above all others as the revered and splendid victor, “that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow...and that every tongue should confess JESUS CHRIST IS LORD, to the glory of God the Father.” What a wonderful and sacred thing this is. Specifically, this passage invites us to try and enter Christ's own mind as he fully and embarrassingly emptied himself to take the form of a servant – a servant of God, a servant to his torturers, and a servant for all mankind. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...” We are being called during this Holy Week to bring ourselves closer to

Jesus by walking alongside him in his passion. We are being called to recall the events that took place and participate in them so that we might appreciate his sacrifice all the more.

The humiliation that we might face in the process is nothing compared to the humiliation Jesus did face. But why did Jesus do all these things? Why did Jesus humble himself and make the brutal walk to the place of his execution?

The answer, of course, is Love. Jesus did all these things because of his eternal love for the created world. I'm sure we all know John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God so loved the world. He didn't wipe the earth clean, instead he chose to save it. He didn't march in with an Army to conquer the lands, he entered Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. He didn't smite his captors and set himself free, he allowed himself to be captured and tortured, and died so that we might be free from death.

Jesus knew that he was going to die, and he knew how he was going to die. He was God, so he knew what he was to fulfill. But he was also human, so he was surely afraid. He had our emotions, our same physical strength. How better of a way, then, to enter Christ's mind than to imagine ourselves in his shoes as we walk alongside him this week?

I expect that this practice of walking along with Jesus to the cross does not make us feel good – at least not without the promise of Easter. What if we didn't have the Resurrection? What a sad, miserable story this would be. It would certainly be lost to time like the stories of the countless other people the Romans crucified over their centuries in power. But happily, we know that this is not a story lost in time, for we know that Our Saviour rose again from this rock-hewn grave to life and glory. What a joy! In order to feel that joy all the more, it is thus important that we can also carefully descend into this place of sadness and grief with Christ and his Blessed Mother. It appeals to our human senses. We get to feel something. Both the sadness of the Passion, and the sheer joy of the Resurrection. For God so loved the World, that he bore a cross for us. He so loved the world, that even though the story could have ended in worldly victory, it instead ends in worldly sorrow so that heavenly victory could be achieved.

As we continue to walk with Christ during this most Holy week, and we follow him into a place of despair and hopelessness, the Resurrection provides us with the lens to see that love permeates all that Jesus does. While he didn't have to let this happen the way it did, it did happen so that we can see that the Love of God is shaped not as a heart on little valentine's day cards, but that Love is shaped like a cross. A heavy, dirty, miserable cross. And for us sensing human beings, that is something for us to grasp to, both in our brightest days, and in our darkest.

St. Paul later says in 1 Corinthians: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (1 Corinthians 15.54-57).

Thanks be to God for the gifts he has given us, and the ability to follow our Lord to his death and resurrection. May this week be for us both challenging and humbling, and may we come to see the love that God has for us through his most blessed son.

Amen.