

Palm Sunday
March 24, 2024

Every time I celebrate Palm Sunday outside home, my mind goes back home where the church will be full and every person will be holding a palm branch in procession into the city singing hosanna to the Prince of Peace, Christ Jesus our Lord and King. That alone takes a little over an hour. We return to the church tired before we listen to this painful and cruel story of our Lord's Passion.

So on occasion like this, there is a big part of me that feels I should just keep my mouth shut and go directly back to my chair. And there is probably a majority of you who feel exactly the same way. Partly because of the length of the Gospel. But mostly is because of the story itself. Its dramatic narrative. Its power to move us. The variety of emotions it brings up in each of us. There's a very good reason why we call it The Greatest Story Ever Told.

And so, silence might be the best way to go, the wisest and the most practical thing to do. But if I was going to do that, I probably would have done just that already, I would have gone back to my chair without saying a word. But because this story is so rich, because there are so many things to consider, I think it might be helpful to provide a small degree of focus, provide a kind of starting point for us as we enter into this holiest of weeks. And in no way is what I have to say the final word on the Passion of Jesus. That would be ridiculous.

So please consider what I have to say as simply one thought to reflect on, one idea to think about that hopefully will help you enter this week in the best frame of mind, a frame of mind which will help you enter into the mystery that will unfold over the next seven days. But please, I encourage you to keep this story in the forefront of your mind this week, and ask God to reveal himself to you in whatever way you need him to. God's Word is an active and living word and therefore will move the hearts and minds of

all who open themselves up to it, its truth, its power, its meaning, its life-giving inspiration.

My dear friends, this can be a difficult week. Most of us would prefer to simply jump ahead to Easter, skip all the stuff that is painful for us to hear or imagine or think about. Most of us only want to experience the “end of the story”, how it “comes out”, without having to live through the story itself. The heartache. The disappointment. The betrayal. The suffering. The shattered dreams.

My dear friends, in many ways the pattern of this week, what we call the Paschal Mystery is not just the “plot” of Jesus’ story. No, it is so much more than that. It is actually the story of each of our lives - a deep and abiding truth that is a kind of template, informing and shaping and transforming all that we do and who we are. Yet, because of what we believe in faith, because of the hope we place in our God and in his promises, we wish that we can just flip to the end, to the good stuff, to the joyous fulfillment of our deepest longings.

But this week shows us otherwise, for it shows that loving costs something, that doing right by others costs something, that following God’s will costs something. Yet, the cost of living a faith-filled life, the cost of discipleship, the cost of loving, the cost of which is our lives laid down for others, is infinitely offset by the incredible power unleashed on the world whenever we seek to love as Jesus loved and loves.

You see that Jesus did nothing but love and he saved the world. What if we tried to do the same, tried to love every person and in every situation? That’s what it means to walk up that lonely hill with him, not begrudgingly but willingly, not fearfully but trusting in God’s promises, not bitter and full of hate but bursting with the love of God dwelling in each of us, that is, bursting with compassion and mercy and forgiveness and generosity and every good thing our loving God showers upon us.

My dear friends, living a faith-filled life is really hard. This week shows us that in a very concrete way. But it also shows the life-changing and world-changing power of loving as God loves. May each of us approach not only this week but also approach every cross that comes our way in this life with the kind of love perfectly shown through Jesus' saving act. That's what faith looks like. Put simply, our individual struggles, heartaches, tragedies, sin, and even death itself is ultimately powerless in the face of great love. God wins. Goodness wins. Love wins every time.

And so as we journey with Jesus this week, as we contemplate these mysteries with grateful hearts, may we come to recognize just how badly God wants each of us to follow the example of Jesus, to follow him up to Calvary, trusting that when we love without reservation or condition, incredible things can and will happen for us, for others, and for the world.

So, let's use this week wisely - use this week to interweave each of our individual stories with the Greatest Story Ever Told. They should fit together perfectly. After all, that's the pattern of every human life, a pattern, a mystery, a profound truth we encounter, and embrace, and stand in awe of this week.

Have a blessed Holy Week everyone.

Short & True Story

During Thomas Jefferson's presidency, he and a group of travelers were crossing a river that had overflowed its banks. Each man crossed on horseback fighting for his life. A lone traveller watched the group traverse the treacherous river and then asked President Jefferson to take him across. The president agreed without hesitation, the man climbed on, and the two made it safely to the other side of the river where somebody asked him: "Why did you select the President to ask this favor?" The man was shocked, admitting he had no idea it was the President of the United States who had carried him safely across. "All I know," he said, "is that on

some of your faces was written the answer 'No' and on some of them was the answer 'Yes.' His was a 'Yes' face."