

PASSION (PALM) SUNDAY 2020

Dear Friends in Christ

For five weeks of Lent we have been preparing by prayer, fasting and almsgiving, for the celebration of Paschal Mystery of Christ. Today we, with the Church throughout this virus-ridden world, begin Holy Week and its solemn celebrations.

What do you think was in the mind of Jesus as he entered Jerusalem? For some Jewish people in Jerusalem, was this Jewish man the deliverer from Roman occupation they longed for? For others, was he a threat to them, their power and their ideas? Whose perceptions were influenced by their traditional notions of the coming of the Messiah? Who, for some time, had problems with what Jesus had said, taught and did to respond to people's needs? Whose expectations – even amongst the disciples -about their longed-for "Messiah" could align with the destiny of Jesus which was to suffer, die and, incomprehensively to all, to rise again.

Let us begin our journey with Jesus during these days of Holy Week as though we were in Jerusalem that day He entered the city. How might we respond – like the women following him with courageous faith or like disciples who were stumbling in the face of his suffering? What was the revelation which was the point of his birth, life, passion and death? May we share His resurrection and new life.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 21:1-11

When they were near Jerusalem and had come insight of Bethpage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples saying to them,
"Go to the village facing you, and you will immediately find a tethered donkey and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone say anything to you, you are to say, 'The Master needs them and will send them back directly.'
This took place to fulfil the prophecy:

*Say to the daughter of Zion: Look, your king comes to you.
He is humble, he rides on a donkey and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.*

So the disciples went out and did as Jesus had told them. They brought the donkey and the colt, then they laid their cloaks on their backs and he sat on them. Great crowds of people spread their cloaks on the road, while others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in his path. The crowds who went in front of him and those who followed were all shouting:

*'Hosanna to the Son of David
Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heavens!*

And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil. 'Who is this?' people asked, and the crowds answered, "This the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

The Word of the Lord.

PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE

Father of Jesus,
You sent your Son, born of woman,
to proclaim the love you have and the reconciliation You intend for all creation.
May your Holy Spirit guide us to truth and by Jesus' example.
May we live and learn in union with You each day
and in the Kingdom of Your promise.
We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

A READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH 50: 4-7

The Lord has given me a disciple's tongue.
So that I may know how to reply to the wearied, he provides me with speech.
Each morning, he wakes me to hear, to listen like a disciple.
The Lord has opened my ear.

For my part, I made no resistance, neither did I turn away.
I opened my back to those who struck me, my cheeks to those who tore at my beard.
I did not cover my face against insult and spittle.
The Lord comes to my help so that I am untouched by the insults.

So, too, I set my face like flint.
I know I shall not be shamed.

THE WORD OF THE LORD

RESPONSORIAL PSALM from Psalm 21

MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU ABANDONED ME?

All who see me deride me. They curl their lips, they toss their heads.
'He trusted in the Lord, let him save him. Let him release him if this is his friend.'

Many dogs have surrounded me, a band of the wicked beset me.
They tear holes in my hands and my feet. I can count every one of my bones.

They divide my clothing among them. They cast lots for my robe.
O Lord, do not leave me alone. My strength, make haste to help me!

I will tell of your name to my brethren and praise you where they are assembled.
'You who fear the Lord give him praise. All sons of Jacob, give him glory.'
Revere him, Israel's sons.

MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU ABANDONED ME?

A READING FROM THE LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11

His state was divine, yet Christ did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are, and being as men are, he was humbler yet, even accepting death, death on a cross.

But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The Word of the Lord

CHRIST BECAME OBEDIENT FOR US EVEN TO DEATH,
DYING ON THE CROSS.
THEREFORE GOD RAISED HIM ON HIGH
AND GAVE HIM A NAME ABOVE ALL OTHER NAMES.

THE PASSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO MATTHEW 27: 11-54

Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate, the governor, and the governor put to him this question, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' Jesus replied, 'It is you who say it.'

But when he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he refused to answer at all. Pilate then said to him, 'Do you not hear how many charges they have brought against you?' To the governor's complete amazement, he offered no reply to any of the charges.

At festival time, it was the governor's practice to release a prisoner for the people, anyone they chose. Now there was at that time a notorious prisoner whose name was Barabbas. So when the crowd gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Which do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?' Pilate knew it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.

Now as he was seated in the chair of judgement, his wife sent him a message, 'Have nothing to do with that man. I have been upset all day by a dream I had about him.'

The chief priest and the elders, however, had persuaded the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas and the execution of Jesus. So when the governor spoke and asked them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?', they said 'Barabbas'. 'In that case,' Pilate said to them, 'what am I to do with Jesus who is called the Christ?' They all said, 'Let him be crucified!' Pilate said to them, 'What am I to do with Jesus who is called Christ?' They all said, 'Let him be crucified!'

'Why?' he asked, 'What harm has he done?'
But they shouted all the louder, 'Let him be crucified!'
Then Pilate saw that he was making no impression, that in fact a riot was imminent.
So he took some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd and said,
'I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your concern.'
The people, to a man, shouted back, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'
Then he released Barabbas for them.
He ordered Jesus to be first scourged and then handed over to be crucified.

The governor's soldiers took Jesus with them into the Praetorium
and collected the whole cohort round him.
Then they stripped him and made him wear a scarlet cloak,
and having twisted some thorns into a crown,
they put this on his head and placed a reed in his right hand.
To make fun of him, they knelt to him saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!"
They spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head with it.
When they had finished making fun of him,
they took off the cloak and dressed him in his own clothes
and led him away to crucify him.

On their way out, they came across a man from Cyrene, Simon by name,
and enlisted him to carry his cross.
When they had reached a place called Golgotha, that is, the place of the skull,
they gave him wine to drink mixed with gall, which he tasted but refused to drink.
When they had finished crucifying him, they shared out his clothing by casting lots,
and then sat down and stayed there keeping guard over him.

Above his head was placed the charge against him.
It read: 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'
At the same time, two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

The passers-by jeered at him. They shook their heads and said
'So you would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Then save yourself!
If you are God's son, come down from the cross!'
The chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him in the same way.
'He saved others,' they said, 'he cannot save himself. He is the king of Israel.
Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him.
He put his trust in God; now let God rescue him if he wants him
for he did say, "I am the son of God."'
Even the robbers who were crucified with him taunted him in the same way.

From the sixth hour, there was darkness over all the land until the night hour.
And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?'
that is 'My God, my God, why have you deserted me?'
When some of those who stood there heard this, they said, 'The man is calling on Elijah',
and one of them quickly ran to get a sponge which he dipped in vinegar
and putting it on a reed, gave it him to drink.

‘Wait!’ said the rest of them, ‘and see if Elijah will come to save him.’
But Jesus again crying out in a loud voice, yielded up his spirit.

--- PAUSE ---

At that, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom.
The earth quaked. The rocks were split.
The tombs opened and the bodies of many holy men rose from the dead,
and these, after his resurrection, came out of the tombs,
entered the Holy City and appeared to a number of people.
Meanwhile the centurion, together with the others guarding Jesus,
had seen the earthquake and all that was taking place, and they were terrified
and said, ‘In truth this was a son of God.

THE GOSPEL OF THE LORD.

REFLECTION – developed from Patricia Stevenson RSJ www.sosj.org.au/ Sunday readings Year A

History records people who worked and struggled to bring freedom or safety to others even to die in the attempt, sometimes at the hands of those they were trying to save. We Australians saw that happen during the bushfires during summer. At the moment, the whole world is witnessing the self-sacrificial actions of health workers caring for CoVid 19 virus victims. Think of members of your family or others you know who give of themselves in extraordinary ways even every day for the good of someone in need?

Our faith calls us to live consciously, intelligently and perceptively in our own circumstances the Easter Paschal Mystery of Christ. In our practical and especially our difficult circumstances, a consolation would be to discern over time, through the guidance of the Spirit, how the Father’s unconditional love for every person and for all Creation is real and active in our own circumstances. Was this the message and mission of Jesus? During Holy Week and every week, may the supreme power of God and the unconditional love of God for all persons which Jesus lived, suffered and died for, encourage us. The last words of Mary MacKillop to her Sisters were ‘Go on!’
Let’s go on!

Psalm text from The Psalms, A New Translation 1963 The Grail (England) Collins in Fontana Books.
Other scriptures from the Jerusalem Bible 1968 Darton, Longman & Todd and Doubleday & Company Inc.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

**At this beginning of Holy Week,
let us entrust the needs of many to the wisdom and providence of God.**

1.

Amid the culture of fear and death, despair and isolation which marks societies in the world today, may the legislation of our Australian parliaments and international governments, safeguard respect for life and the dignity of persons, and reach out to all in justice, and encourage us in responsible relationships and in our own contributions in our societies.

Lord, hear our prayer.

2.

That despite how Coronavirus is impeding how the Church's nourishes the Baptized, may Holy Week and Easter will be a time of renewal for how all Christians walk in the footsteps of Jesus who trusted his Father. That our Church's preparations for the Plenary Council will be blessed.

Lord, hear our prayer.

3.

That, we Australians will continue to pray for and seek justice for the victims, bystanders and perpetrators of evil identified by the eleven Royal Commissions in our recent Australian history.

Lord, hear our prayer.

4.

That the most vulnerable in our society and people who are poor or in special need - spending the next weeks at home - will get the support they need, be alert to the Holy Spirit in their lives and share goodness, learning, fun and safety in all they do.

Lord, hear our prayer.

5.

That health workers, scientists and key contributors to the well being of others during these difficult times will receive support and our protection, appreciation and co-operation.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

6.

That adults and children living with illness and all people facing their death will be blessed with all they need to be at peace. May all who have gone to God pray with Mary, the mother of Jesus, for people amongst us in need, especially those who have no one to pray for them.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

**God of compassion and wisdom
Teach us Your ways; lead us through our needs.
Through Christ our Lord. AMEN**

