

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Over these past weeks as we have celebrated this solemn Lenten season, we have sought to dispose ourselves to prepare for the dramatic events of salvation history to which we now bear witness as we enter this holiest of holy weeks in the Christian world. In a very special and particular way, the Church has invited us to exercise the Lenten call to prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. These three spiritual exercises have helped to prepare us to understand more ardently and clearly God's plan of salvation through the gift of His Son. Hopefully we have come to inculcate more deeply in our lives the identity of Jesus as one who prayed, fasted, and gave utterly and completely of himself. Our preparation for the unfolding events of Holy Week now finds us standing at the portal or threshold of such dramatic events in human history: the triumphant entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem amidst great cheers and adulation; a meal shared with his companions in the upper room in commemoration of Passover; his being brought before the Roman tribunal for condemnation and sentence; his long road of suffering culminating with his crucifixion.

Luke's Gospel provides an impactful and riveting sequence of events leading up to the passion and death of Jesus. At the Passover meal with his disciples, he explicitly tells them he will suffer. He offers bread and wine; the bread is his body which he will surrender for us. The wine speaks of the transformation of the Covenant given to the Jewish people which will become the New Covenant by Jesus shedding his blood on the Cross. Jesus then tells his disciples that one of them will betray him. Being all too human, the disciples not only argue over who will betray Jesus but also quibble over which among them is his favorite.

He then teaches them about authentic Christian leadership and service. "Let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is the greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? ***I am among you as the one who serves.***" This very identity of Jesus as one who serves is what enables him to surrender to His Father's will, carry his cross, and die for us. It is an interesting observation that the two bookends of this unfolding drama include a Eucharistic meal in which Jesus speaks of service to others and the exchange between Jesus and the two condemned criminals who flank his sides upon the Cross. The one criminal redeems himself by recognizing his own sinfulness. This integrity and honesty lead to reconciliation and forgiveness. He says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus replies, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

During my recent annual retreat, I meditated upon the Gospel of Luke which we read in Cycle C this year. I concentrated upon the Annunciation and Mary's Fiat or "Yes" to God's will and the Passion narrative. I came to recognize that, even though I am a sinner deeply in need of reconciliation and mercy, the Lord still invites me to discipleship and in a particular way to priestly ministry. I invite each one of us to reflect this Holy Week upon our unique as well as corporate call to serve the Lord and one another. Let us recognize in ourselves the various roles of those who participate in Jesus's suffering and passion. Let us ask for the grace to be brothers and sisters walking alongside Jesus during this time...and to be present to him in a new and extravagant way when we come to the tomb early in the morning only to find that our Lord Jesus Christ has risen from the dead.

I pray that you and your families will join us in the beautiful Triduum celebrations this week. May we be present to our Lord, amidst the many demands of daily life, in a truly intimate way. May we seek to understand more profoundly both the depths of God's unconditional love for us and to communicate that love both within our own lives and the lives of those around us. Please be assured of my prayers for you during this most privileged time.