

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Today inaugurates the holiest week in all the Christian world, Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord. In Matthew's Gospel, we experience high drama and so many elements of human nature which we will celebrate liturgically on Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. At the very beginning, we have Judas Iscariot betraying the one he knows to be the Messiah. He is small-minded and greedy; his self-absorption eclipses the role he could have played in the grand design of human history. "He waited for an opportunity to hand him over." The Passion is certainly wrought with opportunity and intrigue. I have often pondered that the story of Judas is not so black and white, quite absolute. Despite his blindness, he clearly knew the depths of Jesus's love. He took his own life. He could not come to terms with his own human weakness and thus ask the Lord for forgiveness. Yet, at its core, Jesus and his companions entering the Passion is all about the salvific nature of God's love.

Added to the drama of betrayal among friends is the wider implication of the Jewish feast of Passover in a highly charged and dangerous political environment. The Jews were living under Roman occupation and so the Passover held great significance in their desire to be free. It is against this backdrop that we have the institution of the Eucharist, "This short scene, covered also in Mk 14: 22-25, Lk 22: 19-20 and I Cor 11: 23-26, contains the essential truths of faith about the sublime mystery of the Eucharist: 1) the institution of this sacrament and Jesus' real presence in it; 2) the institution of the Christian priesthood; and 3) the Eucharist, the sacrifice of the New Testament or the Holy Mass." [The Navarre Bible: Gospel & Acts, Pg. 196]. Jesus offers the sacrifice of himself in the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup filled with the fruit of the vine. At the Mount of Olives, Jesus tells his disciples that their faith will be tested, and he asks them to stand sentry with him as he prays.

This "agony in the Garden" is a sentiment with which we can identify so readily during these difficult times. Our faith has surely been tested as the world as we know it slowly, inexorably changes before us. Each day, more parishioners ask me to pray for them as they or loved ones have been laid off. Just the other day, a most faithful parishioner, who cleans homes for a living, was laid off. Her son shared with me his concern for her. I know many of us have wept at the despair being felt by members of our own families and our parish family as well. A once-robust economy has come to a halt. Through it all, God remains faithful to us. I believe we can enter this passion, this way of suffering, because Jesus did it before us. In a spirit of mutual support, may we stay awake and stand guard, and pray unceasingly for those suffering in our midst and for ourselves.

The passion of our Lord Jesus Christ indeed confirms that the way of suffering must be walked but that, at the end of that journey, life will triumph over death and light will overshadow the darkness. As we see unfolding before us in the Scriptures proclaimed today, all the human treachery and weakness cannot thwart the mission for which the Son was sent to accomplish: the redemption of our sins.

We are not mere bystanders in some dis-interested drama; we are indeed integral participants because we so easily stand in the place of those who accompanied Our Lord along the road to Calvary.

Although we cannot be together in person this Holy Week, you are very close to me and my brother priests in thought and prayer. I sincerely hope you take advantage of the spiritual exercises we will be offering throughout the week. These include daily Mass in Spanish (11:00 am) and English (noon); Evening Prayer at 6:00pm. The priests will be offering a retreat Monday through Wednesday immediately following the noon Mass. Please go to pius.org for more information.

Mary, Help of Christians. Pray for us!

Fr. Tom