

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today begins the holiest week of the Christian world. It begins with the triumphant entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem amidst the shouts of adulation from the people. Yet, this week which begins with such high hopes culminates with the Passion and death of Jesus. How can we make sense of such a dichotomy and radically different responses to Jesus in just a few short days? St. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, frames the answer in such a way that makes sense for us. **“Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found himself human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”** The high drama of triumph and prestige will very quickly recede into a sense of urgent fear and danger. Alas, Jesus freely and willingly enters into this encounter.

St. Gregory of Nyssa, in his *De Beatitudinibus*, offers the following reflection which can help situate us closely to Jesus as we enter this Holy Week. “What is more humble than the King of all creation entering into communion with our poor nature? The King of kings and Lord of lords clothes himself in the form of our enslavement; the Judge of the universe comes to pay tribute to the princes of this world; the Lord of creation is born in a cave; he who encompasses the world cannot find room in the inn...and experiences all our needs, experiences even death itself.” It is Jesus entering into our reality that enables him to suffer the Passion, be affixed so indifferently and cruelly to the Cross...in order that we might be drawn with him forever in the embrace of eternal life.

As I mentioned in last week’s column, I have invited Tom D’Orsi to offer the following reflection. I want to thank Tom, amidst his very demanding schedule, to share his spiritual insights with us.

“Over the years, I have come to realize that there are more than twelve apostles. As Christians and as Catholics, we are all disciples of Christ. We are charged with the responsibility to live more like Christ and spread the Good News of salvation and eternal life. As human beings, we are imperfect and we will never be perfect. That fact should not preclude us from striving each day to close the gap between ourselves and our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Jesus is THE WAY, THE TRUTH and THE LIFE, and he offers each of us the very map we need to navigate our pathway to God - the very set of directions we all need to experience a foretaste of heaven on earth.

As we enter Holy Week, we are reminded of the pain, agony and selfless sacrifice the Jesus willingly takes on for the forgiveness of our sins and out of a love that surpasses human expression. Our lives are a journey of contrasts, ups and downs, happiness and sadness, joy and challenge. The world at large would have us believe that we are entitled to nothing but happiness and good times. The temptation of instant gratification infiltrates our lives at every turn. Escape the inconvenient, escape the pain, escape the challenges, avoid the sacrifice.

We cannot escape the challenges and realities of life because they are woven into its very fabric. We can try not to create them or look for them, but if you’ve lived long enough, you know they will find you. Each challenge offers us a unique opportunity to grow and strengthen our relationship with God. Every hurdle presents two paths: one leads to despair and further distance from God, while the other can show us how our individual experience contains the grace to help others, heal oneself, and draw closer to God. Every experience comes with a decisive choice; perhaps this is the “free will” that God gifts to us. Perhaps it is not simply the choice to choose between good and evil. Perhaps it is also the free will to navigate through the storms of life with grace. Perhaps it is the complete confidence that the storms we face offer us the ability to get closer to God and that our faith will give us the tools we need to help others and continue as disciples of Christ.

I leave with these words: *Love your neighbor as yourself* and the belief that no matter our circumstances, we are never alone. Just open the door when you hear the knock. Invite God in; he is there already! Yet, we wait for our invitation. I believe the poem *Footprints in the Sand* should give us all cause to pause.

**One night I dreamed a dream.
As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.
Across the dark sky flashed scenes of my life.
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand.
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.
After the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
Troublesome times of my life, there was only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why, when I needed you the most, you would leave me.
He whispered, 'My precious child, I love you and will never leave you,
Never, ever, during your trials and testings.
When you saw only one set of footprints,
It was then that I carried you.'**

Thank you, Tom, for this very powerful and grace-filled reflection.

May God grant each one of us abundant blessings this Holy Week. Please take some time out of the busyness of life to be with the Lord. Please join us for the Sacred Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

Fr. Tom