

Sunday March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Palm Sunday

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the guidance we receive to overcome these strange times, and continuing to pray for all our needs at this time.

And so it is that we begin Holy Week celebrating the triumphant entry of Our Lord into Jerusalem, followed by the reading of his passion, from the Gospel of St. Mark. We had a lovely Vigil Mass yesterday evening, with one parishioner mailing me, *'Absolutely the most beautiful and spiritual Palm Sunday mass I have been to... genuinely a special start to Holy Week.'* And so it was. Huge thanks to everyone who is making our liturgies possible and special.

Today's Feast is possibly one of the hardest Feasts in the year of the Church to get right liturgically, prayerfully, emotionally. This is primarily because, having blessed our palms, and proclaimed 'Hosanna to the Son of David', we then listen to the Passion of Christ, and the liturgy changes into something much more sombre, sadder and darker. This change is perhaps highlighted by the fact that today has two names: Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. The fact that the liturgy changes - from a joyous entrance, to the solemn reading of the Passion - is perhaps appropriate, having listened to two Gospel readings which are full of emotions changing, atmospheres changing, people changing.

Judas, from being a disciple, changes into someone who finds it necessary to betray to Jesus, someone whom Jesus describes as friend by his very act of dipping bread into wine, carries out the actions of an enemy. The festivities of the Passover are changed into a celebration of a New Covenant at the Last Supper, as Jesus gives us the Eucharist for the first time and for ever, changing water and wine into his body and blood, celebrating his forthcoming death and prefiguring the resurrection. From being surrounded by all the crowds, then by his apostles, everything changes, as Jesus is alone, in agony in Gethsemane, praying that his Father's will may be done. Pilate changes; from a man in control of hundreds and thousands of men, to a man who cannot control the events and the emotions he is confronted with, even if it means the death of an innocent man. And ultimately the whole earth changes, as darkness descends, and the creator of life, gives up his life.

And yet, at the heart of this story, of these events, is one, unchanging constant; Jesus Christ. Throughout his life and his death his sole desire is to do the will of his Father in heaven, whatever personal pain or cost that entails. And we must never underestimate the pain, the very real pain that Jesus went through, nor the humiliation of the betrayal, the insults, and the very manner of his death. But Jesus was determined that his Father's will should be fulfilled, that all should be accomplished.

His forgiveness - for the one betrayed him, for his friend who denied him, for a political system that condemned him, and for religious intolerance and fear and hatred that killed him - his forgiveness is always present. We can only pray that at least some of those people sought his forgiveness, like the centurion who made his profession of faith at the foot of the cross. But we must also remember whose forgiveness Christ was winning on the cross.

And there is the great unchanging love of Christ. Throughout the whole of this passion, the Last Supper, the Agony in the Garden, the trial, the way of the Cross, and the crucifixion, there is always his love. For every single person mentioned in the whole Passion, and for every single person he died for, for you and for me – his love never changes, nor does it have an end.

*Dear God,*

*Thank you for sending your Son and paving the way for our lives to be set free  
through Jesus' death on the cross.*

*Thank you for what this day stands for - the beginning of Holy Week,  
the start of the journey towards the power of the cross,  
the victory of the Resurrection,  
and the rich truth that Jesus truly is our King of Kings.*

*'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'*

*Thank you that your ways are far greater than our ways,  
your thoughts far deeper than our thoughts.*

*Thank you that you had a plan to redeem, to make all things new.*

*Thank you that your face is towards the righteous,  
and you hear our prayers, and know our hearts.*

*Help us to stay strong and true to you.*

*Thank you that you reign supreme and we are more than conquerors  
through the gift of Christ!*

*Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Let us sing 'Love Is His Word, Love Is His Way.'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQxuC8ByMV4>

This is poem I found about Palm Sunday. It is called, 'What Have We Learned?'

*They shouted with praises, reaching the sky,*

*Pushing and shoving to see Jesus pass by.*

*Crying, 'Hosanna, hosanna, glory to the King!'*

*He comes to us today, great joy He doth bring.'*

*They threw down palm leaves, covering the way,*

*Clearing the way for His entrance that day.*

*Raising joyful voices, as praises filled the air,  
The day had come, God answered their prayer!  
But, in a short time they changed their chant,  
From joyful noise, to a mob's hate-filled rant.  
From Hosanna, hosanna, as when He was praised;  
To crucify Him! Crucify Him, as their anger blazed!  
In disbelief we might question why they turned?  
But maybe the question is, 'What have we learned?'*

Due to covid restrictions we are not allowed to place palms at the back of Church, but throughout the hour of prayer I will be in the Sacristy, and if you would like Palms, for yourselves, loved ones, or housebound, and have not attended one of the masses, please come to the side door, or call in at the presbytery.

There are places available for the 11:30 Mass on Easter Sunday and 10am Stations of the Cross on Good Friday if you would like to book in.

Bit of a damp day, but however you can make it a great start to Holy Week.

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). Any suggestions for ways to keep our faith and spirits up at this time are most welcome!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.