

April 5, 2009

The Palm Sunday celebration of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem begins the most sacred week of the entire year. For Jesus, His entrance into Jerusalem marked the end of a long journey with His disciples from Northern Galilee. His time had come and He, knowingly and willingly, embraced His fate. Jesus is not only the humble Messiah, but the suffering Messiah. We come to know Him, not so much in His spectacular demonstrations of power, but in His agonizing love for us.

This year, the Passion according to Mark is proclaimed during Mass. Mark's Gospel began with the announcement that Jesus is "the Son of God." Jesus' identity is proclaimed twice from the mouth of the Father: at His Baptism and Transfiguration. Now, at Jesus' Death, when He manifested how completely He loved us, the centurion, who witnessed the death of Jesus, professes His identity: "Clearly this man was the Son of God."

On Holy Thursday evening, we begin the Paschal Triduum with the Mass of the Lord's Supper. It is the climax of the entire year and the event most central to our lives. The Paschal Triduum concludes Easter Sunday evening.

What is this Paschal Mystery for which we prepare during the 40 days of Lent and which we celebrate for the 50 days after Easter? The Paschal Mystery, which we celebrate on Holy Thursday evening, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday, is Jesus' passage through the darkness and powerlessness of suffering and death to the resurrected life of victory over sin and death for us and for our salvation. It is the mystery of faith which we often proclaim at Sunday Mass: "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." Sometimes we

proclaim it in this way: “Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life. Lord Jesus, come in glory.”

Our celebration of the Paschal Mystery during the Sacred Triduum and at every Mass is not merely a remembrance of what happened once in history. We do not simply re-trace or re-live the last hours of Jesus’ life and death. Rather, we enter into and celebrate mystery.

During the liturgies of Holy Thursday evening, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and indeed at every Mass, we celebrate what Jesus is now doing for us and to us as His disciples whom He calls to conversion, gathers in faith, and empowers with His Holy Spirit. We celebrate the Father renewing us through and with Jesus’ self-giving love and strengthening us with the power of His Holy Spirit to bring, through our own self-giving, His forgiveness, justice, and peace into our families and into our world.

During our celebration of the Paschal Mystery, that is, Jesus’ suffering, Death, Resurrection, and bestowal of His Holy Spirit, the living Jesus is present to us and empowers us through our daily struggles to live not in darkness but in light, not in sin but in virtue, not in apathy and indifference but in commitment and service.

We passed through sin to virtue, through death to life, through darkness to light in our Baptism when we became one with Jesus and with one another in His Church. However, just as Jesus was faithful to the will of His Father every day of His life, not just in His death, so must we strive to live in the life and love of the Lord and in harmony with the Father’s will every day of our lives. We must take up our daily cross if we are to be His faithful disciples.

Alone, this would be too much for us, but Jesus is with us. We are one with Him in our celebration of His Paschal Mystery at every Mass. In each Mass, He

strengthens us to let go of our hurts, pains, disappointments, fears, and self-seeking in order to live in the communion of His love and to share that love with others.

As we celebrate the Sacred Mysteries throughout this Holy Week and in every Mass throughout the year, let us strive to let go our pride and fear, our anger and bitterness, anything that separates us from God or from our brothers and sisters. In our own dying to selfishness and sin, and in our uniting our struggles and suffering with the suffering of Jesus, may we know the peace and reconciliation that no one can take from us.