

St Pius & St Anthony Palm Sunday Year B2

Where do you start? We just heard retold, about the final days, hours and even moments of Jesus' life leading up to His death on the cross for our salvation. So many details and descriptive scenes! I bet that each of us have phrases or images that are still reverberating in our minds after just hearing Mark's account of Jesus' passion. Over the course of Holy Week, we basically read the passion of Jesus three different times! On Palm Sunday, we read the gospel's version corresponding to whose gospel year we are reading through (This is Mark's Year-B now). Then on Good Friday we always read John's account, and for a third more spotty reading, we hear through our daily mass readings this week an abbreviated chronology of events leading up to Christ's crucifixion, burial. All of this repeated scripture reading invites us to a deeper reflection upon Jesus' last days and hours with us. Of course, on one level, we all know the story (like the old joke about there not being any spoilers about the Movie 'Titanic'- we know the boat sinks in the end). Yes, we have a big '*Hint-Hint*' hanging on the wall behind me (the crucifix). But our re-reading of the passion of Christ, helps us appreciate and reconnect ourselves to the source of divine motivation that led our Lord to accept such intense suffering for our sake- It is Love- God's infinite charity, Divine Mercy!

Our temptation when hearing the Passion, is to automatically check out and not listen closely to its details. I grant that it is long and overwhelming. I think of hearing it out, the whole passion account, as similar to standing in front of the mile-long shelf of 10,000 cereal box flavors, when I simply want some corn flakes! It is too much. But I encourage this approach; I invite you to sit with whatever detail or image stuck with you. Maybe it was a word, maybe a question, maybe a lasting impression. Maybe it was one of the characters that you especially identified with this year. Well, take that inspiration and continue meditating upon it, revisiting it yourself several times this coming week in your daily prayer & quiet reflection. It stuck with you for a reason. So I encourage you to explore it.

Here is an example: Someone brought to my attention how we find in Mark an unlikely evangelist at the foot of the cross (*John specifically tells us that the Blessed Mother and Beloved Disciple John were there-John 19:26-Yet Mark doesn't specifically tell us -though he may presume we know*). This unlikely evangelist who proclaims the Good News - is the very person on the crucifying team- the soldier centurion. He proclaims, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39) Now this was a Gentile, a Roman, an oppressing soldier of Pilate who is responsible for the unjust death sentence. He is the one who ends up announcing the true identity of Jesus! In Mark, there is no human who has made such an identification

until then. Mark had headlined his gospel with that identification (1:1), and the divine voice of the Father announced it from heaven at both the Baptism scene (1:11) and at the Transfiguration (9:7). Now Peter had come close to saying such, right after Jesus had asked “Who do you say I am?” Peter said there, “You are the Messiah (Mark 8:29) but that’s not this highest title of ‘Son of God’. And keep in mind that Peter falters and proves his incomprehension through his third denial when he says to the crowd, (Mark 14:71) *“I do not know this man about whom you are talking.”* So not even getting close to calling Jesus ‘Son of God’, Peter even claims not to know the ‘MAN’ Jesus. But it turns out to be the executioner of Jesus who announces that ‘He is the Son of God’! Jesus’ love touched and turned him (converted!) to this realization. *(It shouldn’t surprise us as Jesus was doing just what he said twice before: He was ‘dying for many’-He came to save and win over exactly those who opposed and persecuted him-Mk 10:45 “For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” & Mk 14:24 “He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many.”)*

But discovering that this outsider and supposed enemy becomes the one person who utters the strongest statement of evangelization on Jesus’ behalf is **very humbling** to all of us disciples. It leads us to ask ourselves, “Where would I have been in that crowd?”, “What would I have done/said for Jesus?” In a way, we all have to face through our Holy Week observance that we share a part in sending Jesus to the cross. So, as we read/hear such an abundance of scripture every day in this coming week, I encourage you to keep a personal time each day to study and reflect upon the details of Jesus’ passion and suffering that leads to the cross. There is so much for us to discover in the scripture. As Jesus asked in the garden of His apostles, ‘Keep watch and pray’ (Mk 14:34), so our daily reading of scripture can be a way for us to ‘stay with Him’ in prayer this Holy Week.