

St Pius & St Anthony Homily Palm Sunday Year A1

Where does one start reflecting upon the Word of God? We heard so much scripture today. But fasten your scripture seat belt, because we are going to speed, in this coming Holy Week, through a lot of scripture. Today we read the entire passion of Matthew's gospel (according to which year we are in with our three year cycle of readings- AB or C: Matt, Mark, Luke). Then on Good Friday we always read John's gospel version. And with our extra days of services this week, on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sat Night and Easter Sunday morning, we get even more extra opportunities to read more of God's word. To top, it all off today, I love how we have two gospels: 1) the first one tells of the Palm Procession of Jesus into Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week (displaying the apostles' helpfulness to Jesus and the people's hospitality-welcoming Jesus eagerly to celebrate His Leadership (or Lordship), and then 2) the second gospel recount the devolving progression of Jesus' sacrifice from the Holy Thursday Passover meal (Last Supper –First Mass) through Jesus' trial, torture, sorrows and crucifixion. It is a lot. So, again, where does one start?

There is a saying people use a lot that goes, "***The devil is in the details.***" It refers to the trap of fine print, the trouble hidden, or the setup waiting to frustrate us in all that small wording in contracts or directions. Not paying attention to the little box of words, right by the signature line, usually brings devilish surprises onto us (like, "Oh I didn't see that line about the 45% interest on carryover balances"). That surely happens. But I find that some small print, or little fine details, can present opportunities of grace. Sometimes God provides the help we need in the small places too. If we do look, God is close at hand too, and He will provide whatever we need to manage /overcome those devilish tricks (I remember back at the beginning of Lent we heard about the devil tempting Jesus in the desert, and after the Devil's taunts, the reading said, "angels came and ministered to Jesus"-Matt 4:11). So, I suggest we rework that saying to be that "***Divinity is in those details too!***" So it is worth our time today for us to examine some details from our lengthy passion reading today.

I like to point out, that we know the overall story of the Passion of Christ, (it is no spoiler to anyone that yes, Jesus ends up dying at the end story), but I always say we must stay tuned for the sequel! He rises! I especially want to suggest that as we read through all of these words of scripture today and this

coming Holy week, I encourage everyone to take special note of anything that you seem to hear for the first time, or any detail that you hadn't paid attention to before – because Divinity (God's grace) may be in such details, for you.

Most striking to me is the flip, the turn around and the inconstancy of the people in the story- from the joy & excitement of Palm Sunday to the anger and destructiveness of Good Friday.

And the treachery! Judas betrays Jesus (Mathew's gospel tells us more detail about Judas than any other gospel- such as his prior negotiation with the chief priests, his arrangement for a signal to them, his actual verbal lie to Jesus' face when Jesus mentions a betrayer in their company & his cold cruelty in betraying Jesus with a kiss-so insincere!). But to add to the treachery, the Chief priests & elders plot against Jesus, the mob crowd takes joy in bullying a poor teacher, the apostles will abandon Jesus, and Jesus' handpicked successor-leader Peter denies Him. But we have to honestly ask ourselves as supposed disciples to Him now: "Where are we?" or "Where would we have been in this story?"

Here is an interesting thought to meditate on: Imagine these hurts to Jesus.

Judas' betrayal is so obvious & clear, but what about Peter's denial? Peter had even been warned by Jesus that such a fall might be coming. And proudly protesting that he wouldn't do such a thing, Peter goes right ahead and denies Jesus. And I suggest that even before his three verbal denials in the courtyard of the high priests, Peter had already denied Jesus three times earlier in the garden.

More on that in a minute. But, here is a curious question to consider: What led the three different people to interrogate Peter about being with Jesus? Where did that even come from? Why would they suspect Peter, single him out in a crowd? Had they actually seen Peter with Jesus somewhere in the past? Maybe did the apostles and Jesus dressed alike (Team Jesus-uniform?) *Someone once told me cleverly, that they all may have smelled like fish?* Or was it not so much that they knew that Peter was with Jesus, but more relevant at that moment they realized that Peter (& his type-whatever that was) didn't belong in the courtyard with them, outside the Sanhedrin's Headquarters. I love that the gospel itself gives us a detail we often overlook. In Peter's final denial, Matthew 26:73 tells us that the bystander stated, "Surely you too are one of them; **your speech gives you away.**" Okay, Peter, Jesus, & all the band of northern (Yankee) apostles must have had a Galilean accent? Have we heard that before? But how observant of Matthew to

clear that up for us. And that is an example of what paying attention to details can bless us with--- a clearer understanding of the story.

So, how about Peter's denials? I mentioned that Peter actually denies Jesus **six times** on Holy Thursday night. Those three verbal denials with his words distanced himself from Jesus, but earlier in the Garden of Gethsemane we saw Peter by his own actions, three times ignore or emotionally distance himself from Jesus by sleeping away in Jesus' time of prayer and need. Three times Peter defies Jesus' request to keep watch/awake and sit up with him in solidarity. And those three times by his selfish actions, Peter denies Jesus support and fellowship. So not only with words, but also with actions, Peter denies Jesus.

Words and actions – With words, I know a lot of us get nervous and squirm when we read these passion accounts and come to the crowd part that we have to give voice to, and we call out, "**Crucify Him**". Well, my Palm Sunday reflection is a consideration of how I might hurt Jesus, not just with my words, but more importantly with my actions. By not keeping faith with Him, not staying by His side, not showing by my presence, that I know Him and wish to be in relationship to Him, I hurt Jesus (deny Him). Holy Week invites us to examine both our words and actions that either deny or affirm our relation to Christ. As we enter Holy Week, may our witness of words and actions match each other and show our faithfulness to Christ. So that as we are with him through his suffering and death, we may also be with Him in His rising and new life.