

St Pius & St Anthony Palm Sunday A Homily 2026 Year A Mt 26:14—27:66

Whenever there is so much scripture read at mass, especially in Holy Week, (we will sit through two Passion readings, Matthew today and John on Good Friday) it is good for us to laser in on and lift out just a few words, phrase or sentence that seems to stick with us. When we hear common stories that are overly familiar, it helps to listen for surprising details that jump to our attention (*like the ‘talking stain’ that shouts in the old Tide Detergent TV commercials - the man going for the job interview who is asked what he would provide the company, and he begins a great litany of his gifts/assets, but the stain on his shirt pocket is shouting about the lunch spaghetti they enjoyed of.....should have used TIDE!*) I suggest that whatever detail(s) may still be resonating with you after this reading, it is worth reflecting upon it and returning to it through this Holy week, as God is placing that upon your heart for some insight this Easter. Pray about it and ask, “What is God showing you through it?”

What really strikes me this year about the Passion, might not be a word so much as a response? Jesus’ response to all of the unjust condemnation and wrongful punishment given Him. What is His response? **Silence!** What did He say to defend Himself? Nothing. That is tremendously remarkable! To all the made up charges against Him and the false accusations and mockery of two trials- **Silence!** Have you ever been unjustly targeted or punished? Isn’t there like an instinctual resistance feature (or ‘lashing back’ element) that triggers in our nature after being wronged? I recall my first vivid experience learning that in life. We had a tornado drill in elementary school, and we did the march out of the room into the hall, and faced the wall, kneeling down with heads covered by a hard book, and while we knelt there, teachers patrolled the center way. Yes, they always said, ‘Everyone stay calm and no talking’. Well, out of the blue, I get struck on the back of my legs with a cane. What? Of course, I immediately turned and yelled, “I wasn’t saying anything-that wasn’t me.” (And it really wasn’t!!) But what do you think happened? Yes, another caning strike! To which again, I said, “Stop, I didn’t do anything-it wasn’t me.” What did I hear back? but “You are now, now turn around or you get another!” Lesson one—Although I could have defended, “*With heads down and faces in the wall, how do see Whoever it was talking?*” But this is not the place/time to assert innocence! But what an injustice! I really wasn’t the one talking. (now, had I ever talked before when we weren’t supposed to, yes, but not that time-and that teacher was one I never had for class.)

I know my example is zero compared to Jesus’ infinite injustice endured for our salvation, and all the more remarkable. Jesus doesn’t react – He is silent.

In Matt 26:63, when cornered by the Sanhedrin Tribunal, the high priest demands Jesus respond, saying, 'Have you no answer,' and the verse says, "Jesus was silent". Then when later accused and questioned by another elder in Pilate's presence and then even by Governor Pilate himself, in Matt 27:12-14, it says Jesus "did not answer" the elder (vs12), and then to Pilate himself, it reports that "He did not answer one word." (vs 14). Jesus was silent – no defense. In the face of the all the falsehood, deception and fabrications against Him, Jesus stood up for Truth by being silent. Why? Because He is Truth in Person – Jn 14:6 "I am the Way, TRUTH and Life. Jesus is the Truth. He knew – in fact, the only full truth and pure goodness seen through the whole trial is Jesus Himself.

This comes across clearly to us, when we look at Matthew's use of the word and concept of 'oaths' in his passion account. Mostly they are all 'false oaths' and 'bad faith' expressions. (in the back of my mind I remember Jesus' teaching in Sermon on the Mount forbidding oaths altogether-'let yes be yes & no be no' Mt 5:33-37). Jesus stands out so much more, being Absolute Truth Himself, in the presence of so much falsehood, deceit and bad faith. What are some examples of these? First, we hear in Mt 26:59, that the "chief priests and entire Sanhedrin kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus in order to put him to death, (v60' many false witnesses came forward') Secondly, Peter swears a false oath, when he vehemently denies knowing Jesus, in Mt 26:74 it says that "he began to curse and to swear (oath), *"I do not know the man."* Also, later we will hear in Mt 28:11-15, that guards will be bribed to give false testimony that they saw the apostles come steal the body of Jesus trying to refute the resurrection!

Some people, we'd expect to stand with Truth, turn out to fail and break their oaths. For example, before Peter gave his 'false oath' he had gone way out on the good oath limb, proclaiming in Mt 26:33 "Though all may have their faith in you shaken, mine *will never be.*" Really Peter? Then after Jesus tells him he will deny Him, Peter stretches his nose further saying in vs 35, "Even though I should have to die with you, I will not deny you." *Die*, Peter? Tell the truth, you won't even stay awake with him (3x asleep Mt 26:40-45)! certainly won't stand by him But not just Peter, because a few verses earlier, the whole group had testified that they would not 'betray' after He'd announced that one of them would. They all responded, "Surely, Not I" (26:22 they all pipe in). They will all run away at arrest.

So, who is good and truth-telling all through the Passion? Who stands with Jesus? Again, it may surprise us. Pilate's wife gets mentioned here, because she seems to speak Truth to Power, to her husband giving a command to 'not have anything to do with that **righteous** man Jesus' (Mt 27:19) She actually testifies to His being 'righteous'! Another set of unlikely candidates for 'telling the truth'

(good oath) is the group of soldiers standing watch at the cross, who at Jesus' passing, proclaim, "**Truly, this was the Son of God!**" (Mt 27:54) Of course, the next example is of inanimate material, not personal, but I'd say the earth & rocks gave witness to the Truth too when the earth quaked and the rocks split at the time of Jesus' death (27:51, 54). Were they distancing themselves from this unjust action, telling God, "This is not us, humans did this to your Son?" Yet, most telling of all, and also without saying a word, the ones who Stand with Truth best, are the silent women who followed along and ministered to Jesus (Mt 27:55), and they are mentioned after it is all done of taking their seat by the tomb to 'watch and wait' (Mt 27:61) What the apostles failed to do in the garden, the women fulfill at the tomb. Like Jesus' patient endurance of His passion silently, the women testify to absolute Truth and its vindication (resurrection!) For Holy Week, may we ask ourselves, "Do we stand patiently with Truth?" Can we wait and watch with Him?

Trust!