

GOSPEL

Matthew 27:32-44

As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, ‘This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.’

Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, ‘You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.’ In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, “I am God’s Son.”’ The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

9 April 2017

Today’s celebration can be said to be bittersweet. It is joyful and sorrowful at the same time. We celebrate the Lord’s entrance into Jerusalem to the cries of his disciples who acclaim him as king. Yet we also solemnly proclaim the Gospel account of his Passion. In this poignant contrast, our hearts experience in some small measure what Jesus himself must have felt in his own heart that day, as he rejoiced with his friends and wept over Jerusalem.

The Gospel we heard before the procession (cf. *Mt 21:1-11*) describes Jesus as he comes down

from the Mount of Olives on the back of a colt that had never been ridden. It recounts the enthusiasm of the disciples who acclaim the Master with cries of joy, and we can picture in our minds the excitement of the children and young people of the city who joined in the excitement.

Jesus himself sees in this joyful welcome an inexorable force willed by God. To the scandalized Pharisees he responds: “I tell you that if these were silent, the stones would shout out” (*Lk 19:40*).

Yet Jesus who, in fulfilment of the Scriptures, enters the holy city in this way is no misguided purveyor of illusions, no new age prophet, no imposter. Rather, he is clearly a Messiah who comes in the guise of a servant, the servant of God and of man, and goes to his passion. He is the great “patient”, who suffers all the pain of humanity.

So as we joyfully acclaim our King, let us also think of the sufferings that he will have to endure in this week. Let us think of the slanders and insults, the snares and betrayals, the abandonment to an unjust judgment, the blows, the lashes and the crown of thorns... And lastly, the way of the cross leading to the crucifixion.

He had spoken clearly of this to his disciples: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (*Mt 16:24*). Jesus never promised honour and success. The Gospels make this clear. He had always warned his friends that this was to be his path, and that the final victory would be achieved through the passion and the cross. All this holds true for us too. Let us ask for the grace to follow Jesus faithfully, not in words but in deeds. Let us also ask for the patience to carry our own cross, not to refuse it or set it aside, but rather, in looking to him, to take it up and to carry it daily.

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This Jesus, who accepts the hosannas of the crowd, knows full well that they will soon be followed by the cry: “Crucify him!” He does not ask us to contemplate him only in pictures and photographs, or in the videos that circulate on the internet. No. He is present in our many brothers and sisters who today endure sufferings like his own: they suffer from slave labour, from family tragedies, from diseases... They suffer from wars and terrorism, from interests that are armed and ready to strike. Women and men who are cheated, violated in their dignity, discarded... Jesus is in them, in each of them, and, with marred features and broken voice, he asks to be looked in the eye, to be acknowledged, to be loved.

It is not some other Jesus, but the same Jesus who entered Jerusalem amid the waving of palm branches. It is the same Jesus who was nailed to the cross and died between two criminals. We have no other Lord but him: Jesus, the humble King of justice, mercy and peace.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/Homily?



Head: What crosses are you being invited to carry, so as to join your suffering purposefully, with the passion of Jesus?



Heart: Who are the people that are suffering in your life, and how are you being called to not just in word, but in deed, be Simon of Cyrene for them?



Hands: Who are the people that are suffering in your life, and how are you being called to not just in word, but in deed, be Simon of Cyrene for them?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly **name/describe** their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally **call on the Holy Spirit** to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer **prayers of thanks and praise** to God.
4. **Pray for each others’ prayer needs.** Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another **prayer of praise**, perhaps praying the ‘Glory Be.’