Passion (Palm) Sunday B 2024

 Of all the times we feel the need for gathering together, the time of a loved one’s death is the most solemn, and perhaps, the most necessary. As one’s mortal life passes from us, we huddle together to support one another in our bereavement. We feel what others are feeling. We join the candles of our faith into a light that drives back the darkness.

 At Mass, it is the Lord’s death, and resurrection, around which we gather. *“O Sacred Banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of His Passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace, and the future pledge is given to us.”* This Sunday of Passion we begin a whole week of gathering in prayer and liturgy to proclaim the mystery of our faith. The week of our Lord’s Passion begins with His triumphal entry into His holy city, Jerusalem. *“We adore, You, O Christ, and we bless You, because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.”*

 Scars on His body; His cheeks, beard, and face: we sense the real person behind this experience, a real body being shamed and tormented. St Clare reminds us, in her Second Letter to Agnes*: “to gaze, consider, contemplate, and desire to imitate your Spouse, who for your salvation was despised, struck, scourged untold times throughout His entire body, and then died amid the suffering of the cross.”* Esus, our Love, is crucified.

We are aware of the vital relationship Jesus has with the Father. Let us not separate the spiritual from the physical. God, creator of body and soul, delights in the union of the two that forms human experience. Flesh and spirit are both at God’s service. Flesh and spirit must be cherished and provided for. Our Seraphic Father Francis made sure of that. He desired to feel what Jesus felt. Our Lord’s wounds came from within Francis, bursting forth through his flesh, branding him, marking him. Francis’ desire for “holy communion” is discovered as we celebrate the Centenary of the Stigmata.

Jesus died and rose for us. The week we call “Holy,” is a sacred time when we proclaim publicly and privately the mystery of our redemption. Let us together with our cross, accompany Jesus with His, on this journey, offering ourselves with Him to the Father (3C). It is a journey that goes to life through death. Death gives life, not only when we breathe our last, but all through our Christian existence. Let us share the mystery of His love and our redemption. In this journeying to life, we die in two ways: death comes to us, first, from sin—from the sins of our own fashioning, and second, from “the sin of the world.”

 To the death that is sin, we have been dying since our baptism. This dying is never ended. Dying to sin is turning to Christ. Turning to Christ is daily conversion. If sin is rejection, dying to sin is openness—to God’s presence poured out upon us. The presence of the Holy One tabernacled within us. We live the Rule—in dying to sin, we live to God.

 Death comes to us in a second way—from the very shape of the journey—even apart from sin. For our journey to go forward as Franciscans, to move forward, we have to let go of where we’ve been, to let go of the level of life where we are right now, so as to live more fully. Whether it’s turning 21 or 81, whether it’s losing our health or our hair, a person we love or a possession we prize—we have to move on. The journey is a self-emptying, more or less, like Jesus’ own emptying. Time and again, we have to let go. And to let go is to die a little.

 Following Jesus is imitating Him, journeying with Him, who put aside His divine glory to clothe Himself in our flesh, who let go of Nazareth and His Mother, who let go of the Transfiguration and the Garden of Gethsemane, who let go of Lazarus and his sisters, and who have let go of those He had touched with His forgiveness.

 But we let go for a purpose, this emptying, this dying is not its own end. It’s to grow into Christ Jesus, to be conformed to His dying/rising, growing in loving communion with God, with our sisters and brothers, and with the breath-taking beauty of creation all around us. By dying to sin and to self, can we come fully to life.

 The week of passion, of devotion, of suffering and death and life given over, begins. The Paschal Mystery, our involvement in the dying/rising of Christ, is now. Die a little, to live more fully. We find the heart of Christ amid the turmoil of the Passion, inviting us to enter into communion with the Crucified. To suffer with the Lord’s Suffering Servant, intent on bringing justice, love and peace to the world, speaking a word to sustain the weary, to listen and be a disciple, to suffer our share of the burden of the Gospel, and imitating Jesus. Let us look violence, hate and injustice in the face—with the heart of Christ.

 The passion of our lives belongs to You alone, O Lord. May our very lives be the sacrifice day by day that does justice, forgives, speaks and cares for the broken and suffering of the world, where crucified men and women need persons who have died to sin and self, who live to God and for others. Lord Jesus, may You find us walking with You, the way to the cross and resurrection.



