

### **PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD – 2023**

**Matthew 21: 1 – 11; Isaiah 50: 4 – 7; Psalm 22: 8 – 9, 17 – 18a, 19 – 20, 23 – 24; Philippians 2: 6 – 11; Matthew 26: 14 – 27: 66**

THEME: THE GRAND PARADE ENTRANCE INTO JERUSALEM

#### **REFLECTION**

The Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord is a commemoration of the Jesus Christ's entrance into Jerusalem to accomplish his Paschal Mystery. This courageous act of the Lord launched the Holiest Week of Christianity. According the Homiletic Directory by Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (2015), **“The exuberance surrounding Christ's regal entry immediately gives way to the reading of one of the Songs of the Suffering Servant and the solemn proclamation of the Lord's Passion.”**

The Passion of the Lord to those who are watching Jesus closely and listening to Him intently, is the exposition of **“a king who destroys the weapons of war, a king of peace and a king of simplicity, a king of the poor.”** During the Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord and throughout Holy Week we are invited to look at Christ the King so that we can imitate him. We are also meant to watch the crowd's fickleness as they change from **“Hosanna”** to **“Crucify him”**.

The Passion According to Matthew (26: 14 – 27: 66) begins with the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot. The challenge and lesson of Holy Week is to watch the disciples of the Lord and how they react to the crisis of discipleship. We do all that while gazing on the Lord Jesus who is the central character of Holy Week. In the first reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah we connect Jesus Christ with the Suffering Servant of the Lord, while the Responsorial Psalm takes us to the depths of the human suffering, with the desperate cry of the earth and of the poor, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** The Second Reading from St Paul's Letter to the Philippians responds with a hymn that sings that the praises of Christ Jesus as the epitome of Divine Emptying on the cross.

### **MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK – 03 APRIL 2023**

**Isaiah 42: 1 – 7; Psalm 27: 1-3, 13 -14; John 12: 1 – 11**

THEME: THE LAVISH ANOINTING OF PURE LOVE IN BETHANY

#### **REFLECTION:**

After the exhilarating entrance into Jerusalem announcing Himself as the King of Peace by riding on a donkey, Jesus goes to his friends in Bethany. He is emotionally drained because he knows what is going to happen by the week end. At the same time, he is inspired because he knows that this is the will of God. The safe of space of Bethany with loving friends gives Jesus the opportunity to recharge his spiritual and emotional batteries for the difficult days ahead. Mary the contemplative who sat at the feet of Jesus has been kept **‘a pound of pure nard’**, the best perfume, for whatever reason, sensed that Jesus more than ever needed the extravagant gesture of love. She **“anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment.”**

More than two thousand years later we can still smell fragrance of the compassion. The pure love of friendship holding the beloved other in the times of crisis. The agape meal shared with beloved friends before the last supper; Martha serving, Lazarus living and Mary loving thus changing Bethany from a house of affliction into a home of hospitality and love. Only Judas sees waste in love, because his traitor's heart had already lost the plot. He had sold his soul to the devil but like all lost causes he hid behind the poor. Jesus the Light and Salvation saw into the heart of Judas and would not be denied of this anointing of love. He told Judas, **“Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”**

We are invited by the Lord to anoint each other with love while we are stilling alive. Let us not wait for death before we can praise and affirm each other. Let us spare not cost at loving those who are close to us as family, friends and brothers and sisters in Christ.

## **TUESDAY OF HOLY WEEK – 04 APRIL 2023**

Isaiah 49: 1 – 6; Psalm 71: 1 – 4a, 5 – 6ab & 17; John 13: 21 – 33, 36 – 38;

THEME: THE NIGHT JUDAS DID THE UNTHINKABLE

### **REFLECTION**

**Saint Pope John Paul II reflecting on the Thursday Evening of the Lord's Supper wrote to the Priests of the world these words on Judas:**

“The betrayal of Judas appears emblematic of humanity's sin. **“It was night”**, observes the Evangelist John (13:30): the hour of darkness, an hour of separation and of infinite sadness. Yet in the emotion-filled words of Christ the light of dawn already shines forth: **“I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (Jn 16:22).**

We must never cease meditating anew on the mystery of that night. We should often return in spirit to this Upper Room, where we priests especially can feel in a sense **“at home”**. With regard to the Upper Room, it could be said of us what the Psalmist says of the peoples with regard to Jerusalem: **“In the register of peoples, the Lord will write: These were born here” (Ps 86:6).**”

The Spiritual Life has many dark nights of the soul that we have to experience. We can easily dismiss Judas as a character that is really outside of our experience. But the reality is that we also betray the Lord many times in our lives.

We behave like people of the night when we think that it is only our voices and our opinions that matter. When we put our needs ahead of the needs of others then it is night, and we are Judas. When there is only one way of doing things, that is the way that puts us ahead of others then, we are Judas, and it is night.

## **WEDNESDAY OF HOLY WEEK – 05 APRIL 2023**

Isaiah 50: 4 –9a; Psalm 68: 8 –10, 21 –22, 31, 33 –34; Matthew 26: 14 –25

THEME: JUDAS ISCARIOT THE TRAITOR, ONE OF TWELVE

### **REFLECTION:**

**Pope Benedict XVI reflects on Judas:**

“The meaning of the name **“Judas”** is controversial: the more common explanation considers him as a **“man from Kerioth”**, referring to his village of origin situated near Hebron and mentioned twice in Sacred Scripture (cf. Gn 15: 25; Am 2: 2).

The betrayal itself happens in two moments: before all, in the planning, when Judas agreed with Jesus' enemies to 30 pieces of silver (cf. Mt 26: 14-16), and then, in its execution, with the kiss given to the Master in Gethsemane (cf. Mt 26: 46-50).

In any case, the Evangelists insist on the status as an Apostle that Judas held in all regards: he is repeatedly called **“one of the twelve”** (Mt 26: 14, 47; Mk 14: 10, 20; Jn 6: 71) or **“of the number of the twelve”** (Lk 22: 3).

He is therefore a figure belonging to the group of those whom Jesus had chosen as strict companions and collaborators. This brings with it two questions in the attempt to provide an explanation for what happened.

The first consists in asking how is it that Jesus had chosen this man and trusted him. In fact, although Judas is the group's bursar (cf. Jn. 12: 6b; 13: 29a), in reality he is called a **“thief”** (Jn 12: 6a).

The mystery of the choice remains, all the more since Jesus pronounces a very severe judgement on him: **“Woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed!”** (Mt 26: 24).”

### **THURSDAY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER – 06 APRIL 2023**

Exodus 12: 1 – 8, 11 – 14, Psalm 116: 12 – 13, 15, 16bc, 17 – 18; I Corinthians 11: 23 – 26; John 13: 1 – 15

THEME: APRON OF SERVICE AND TOWEL OF HUMILITY

#### **REFLECTION**

The Thursday of the Lord's Supper launches the Easter Triduum which could be said to be the ultimate commemoration of the Paschal Mystery. Triduum simply means 'three days', referring to the sacred days of Holy Thursday evening through Friday evening (day one), include Friday evening through Saturday evening (day two), and conclude with the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday (day three). The Divine Plan of Salvation take place over these three days. Holy Thursday commemorates the sign of service that Jesus gave us on that night of the Last Supper. He who came not to be served but to serve positioned service as a constitutive element of following Him to the point of giving his life. The washing of the feet was not a safe act but a radical action. Interpreting that radical action according the mind of the Church, the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Priesthood cannot be understood without this humble act of washing feet.

The Eucharist is a risky and dangerous business, because we receive the body of Christ and the blood of Christ who was revolutionary and counter-cultural. Service is at the heart of the Eucharist, so that when we minister in the Eucharist, it is not just meant to make us feel good about ourselves but to pour every ounce of our being and talent for the Lord and the community at our inconvenience.

Priesthood is the same, it is not about people liking you, thinking that you are the best thing since slice bread. Priesthood is about serving God in his people even if they do not appreciate you. St Paul puts it like this, **“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the chalice, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”**

### **GOOD FRIDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD – 2023**

Isaiah 52: 13 – 53: 12; Psalm 31: 2, 6, 12 – 13, 15 – 16, 17, 25; Hebrews 4: 14 – 16; 5: 7 – 9; John 18: 1 – 19 :42

THEME: PASSION OF THE LORD TRANSFORMS OUR SUFFERING

With the washing of the feet the last night we were given the insight that Jesus understood his impending death as a transformative and game-changing event. He was aware that his disciples were not really going to understand the full impact of his death. Hence when Peter threw a tantrum refusing to have his feet washed, He told him, **“What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand.”**

After two thousand years it seems that it is not just Peter who did not understand what his Master was doing but many of us still do not quite get it. But thankfully, we have the sense that something powerful and transformative happened on that Friday afternoon in AD 33, which we now call Good. We look back on that day with Christian hindsight and we claim that the death of an unknown son of a carpenter from Nazareth launched a revolution that changed the world.

We go back to the Jewish Scriptures to interpret that death with the words of Isaiah, **“Behold, my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high...”** The cross meant to be the bringing down of the preacher from Galilee instead raised Him up. His death was not the last word of the brutality of Roman Emperor but a saving word of the King of Kings.

The Passion narrative according the gospel of John begins with what seems like a capture of Jesus in the Kidron valley, **“where there was a Garden”**. The capture becomes a great proclamation of the Divine Son of the Father, for in this episode Jesus asserts His divinity, when He says to those who are looking for Him, **“I am he”**. Instead of capturing him **“they drew back and fell to the ground.”**

### **EASTER VIGIL IN THE HOLY NIGHT – 08 APRIL 2023**

We have just emerged from the cold, silent and dark night of the tomb where we have been contemplating our Lord's Passion and Death. But we did bless fire so that as the prayer suggested, ***“we may be so inflamed with heavenly desires...”***

Our sacred fire's flame lights the Paschal Candle which is the symbol of the risen Christ, hence when consecrating it, the priest says, **Christ yesterday and today, the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega, All time belongs to him and all ages, To him be glory and power through every age and forever. Amen**

In a dark church, the deacon proclaimed, **The Light of Christ** three times and we responded, **Thanks be to God.** The risen Christ represented by the Easter Candle pierced the darkness of death. The one flame of the Sacred Fire now on the Easter Candle is share among us, the baptised so that with our own light from The Light we can with the Psalmist pray, “Lord in your light we see light.”

The Easter Proclamation called us to **‘exult ... let the trumpet of salvation sound aloud our mighty King's triumph... ’.**

The Word of God took us through the story of salvation. Beginning with the story of creation, how God created everything including the human person. We responded in song that indeed the Lord, should send forth His Spirit and renew the face of the earth. Our salvation history is our faith story which goes back to Abraham our father in faith. This faith story culminates in the Exodus as the People of Israel crossed the Red Sea with Moses as their leader. It would be the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Baruch to mention a few) who would call Israel back to God time and time again, due to false worship and faith crises. All this time, God is preparing His people for the greatest gift of all, the risen Christ. St Paul puts rather delicately, ***“All of us who have been baptised in Christ Jesus were baptised into his death... so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in the newness of life.”***

### **EASTER SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION – 09 APRIL**

Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI writes the following about Christ's resurrection as foundational to the Christian faith, **“The Christian faith stands and falls with the truth of the testimony that Christ is risen from the dead.”**

The truth and the fact of the resurrection of the Lord should therefore be considered carefully. The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is not just a myth that has meaning but it is the truth that proclaims something fundamental radical about God and His Son, Jesus Christ and world. The Resurrection declares that God is in charge and in his Son Jesus Christ, darkness is as light as the day and death has no power and is the door to eternal life. Evil is vanquished and sin is defeated.

The resurrection of the Lord demands courageous living from the believers. It invites those who believe to radical action. It calls us to confront our fears, insecurities and doubts and take decisive action about the direction and meaning of our lives.

In the gospel, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb on the first of the week, while it was still dark. She knew the dangers but she went anyway. When she is confronted with the empty tomb, she runs to call others to come and see. John the author of the Gospel, in an understated way makes it clear that the one who has encountered the empty tomb, must go and tell others. Faith in the risen Lord is not for the faint hearted. It requires a dynamism not just of physical energy but a dynamism of spirit and will.

John and Peter with great haste and energy also ran to the empty tomb. This suggests the urgency of the good news of the resurrection. Christians cannot take it easy because the matter of the resurrection is urgent and demands dynamic engagement. All the modern ways of communication have to be engaged so that the message of the risen Lord can reach everyone