

Dear Friends,

“Since the beginning of Lent until now we have prepared our hearts by penance and charitable works. Today we gather together to herald with the whole Church the beginning of the celebration of our Lord’s Paschal Mystery, that is to say, of his Passion and Resurrection. For it was to accomplish this mystery that he entered his own city of Jerusalem. Therefore, with all faith and devotion let us commemorate the Lord’s entry into the city for our salvation, following in his footsteps, so that, being made by his grace partakers of the Cross, we may have a share also in his Resurrection and in his life.” (Roman Missal, Introduction to the Mass on Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord).

Today we begin Holy Week, our most sacred time of the year, and this day, Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord, is unique in the fact that it is the only Sunday throughout the year when two Gospel readings are proclaimed. First there is Jesus’ triumphant entrance into Jerusalem and later his Passion.

In Mark’s account of Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem we see Jesus totally in control. He sends his disciples to find a colt, even giving them the answer they should offer when questioned by the people. Jesus knows what awaits him in Jerusalem.

Mark’s Passion account begins with a conspiracy, Judas *“looked for an opportunity to hand him over”* (14:11). The Passion then moves swiftly from the Last Supper to the arrest in Gethsemane to the trials before both religious and civil authorities to the crucifixion, to Jesus’ being laid in another person’s tomb, a stone being rolled in front of it and finally two followers watching where he was laid.

The Passion is a story of complete abandonment. The disciples fall asleep while Jesus prays; Judas betrays his master with a kiss and the disciples flee. Later Peter denies ever having known Jesus; the chief priests and the Sanhedrin put up false witnesses against him; Pilate caves into the rabble rousers and condemns Jesus to death, even releasing a notorious prisoner; the soldiers mock, spit upon and strike him; and once crucified, even the two crucified with him revile him along with all those passing by. Lastly, Jesus’ final words make it appear as if he is all alone: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (15:35). The story is one of cruelty, dishonesty, abuse of power, failure of those who knew better, and silence on the part of One who could have done something.

And yet, we hear at the end that there is a tear in the Temple’s sanctuary veil, a signal that new access to God has been created. A centurion even comments, *“Truly, this was the Son of God!”* (15:39). What brought him to speak these words? How do we demonstrate his words today? We have been spending the last five weeks focusing on how we might ***“Return With All Your Heart”*** to the Lord. This Holy Week may we do just that, *if we haven’t already*. May we surrender our hearts fully and completely to our God who revealed the depth of His loving, sacred heart to us that we might know and live the life for which we were created.

*Peace and blessings,
Fr. John*