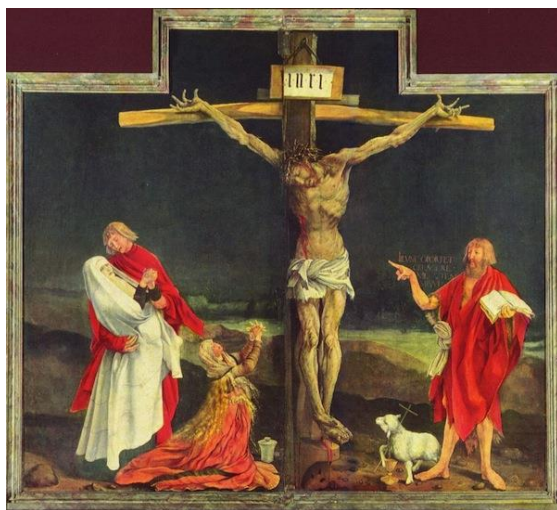


Palm Sunday “Save Us We Pray” April 5 2020

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

Save us we pray! These words were spoken to Jesus as He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. They are spoken by many people now in the face of this present plague. They are spoken as a plea by non-believers and believers alike in every age when people are faced with impending death.

In the medieval period, the Black Death killed a quarter of the population in Europe. They did not have to look at the news for shocking things, they just looked out the window. And instead of seeing families playing with their kids and walking the dog, they saw dead bodies piled up. The movies were not gory, life was. And they turned to the passion story and focused their hope on it.



There is a painting displayed at the Unterlinden Museum in France called the Isenheim Altarpiece. It was installed in St Anthony's Hospital in Isenheim, Germany, a facility for people with terrible skin diseases at the time of Martin Luther. This painting hung over the altar where they worshiped. The Jesus in the painting is huge, nine feet tall. He has the same sort of skin lesions the patients had.

The medieval church said that the solution was not God taking away the Black Death or whatever problem they had, but it was found in God taking that problem to himself. Like Moses in the wilderness raising up a bronze serpent. The people had prayed that God take the snakes away, instead they were called on to look at another serpent, the very problem. And in looking at it they were healed. But it wasn't so much the looking at it; it was the trusting in it.

In our Gospel, Jesus was facing death. The Jewish leaders were plotting his death. Jesus was aware of all this. He did not naively ride into Jerusalem and get caught up in some larger machinery as a victim. He is pushing buttons and manipulating this situation so these people will kill him on Friday; for that is what He came to do.

When He rides into Jerusalem, He is fulfilling a prophecy. The Galilean pilgrims who see him on a donkey all are excited. They want this new king to seize power. The Pharisees are troubled by it, but they seem to retain some doubts about exactly who He is. The Sadducees are beside themselves with fear. They are terrified of what this means. The Romans who fear another fierce Jewish warrior, simply see an ordinary Jewish guy riding on a donkey, not a terribly formidable sight by any estimation. The temple workers will discover just what sort of a king this is when Jesus makes a whip and drives them out of the temple to the cheers and jeers of the pilgrims who they have been defrauding in the money changing booths every year since anyone can remember.

Jesus sets the stage for his own sacrificial death, the Jesus who has all this in mind, and sets in motion the series of events which will result in his death for the sins of the whole world. It is an event which defines Christ, especially when we see it coupled with His great love which drives these events.

Hosanna! The crowds shout as Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey. Hosanna! We sing as we process into the church, between the palm fronds as we follow His cross up to the chancel where it is placed next to the pulpit. And if we follow the liturgy, we sing the words of those people every time before celebrating the Sacrament of the altar: Hosanna, Hossana, Hosanna in the highest!

The Sanctus (Holy, holy, holy) starts with Isaiah's vision and the seraphim's song but quickly transitions into the song of the people who welcomed Jesus. And in this way, we become part of this crowd, participating with the folks who sang Jesus into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday. We welcome Jesus every time we come to this place. He "arrives" to save us too. **They** did not understand who it was they welcomed, but their acclamation was accurate nonetheless. He was the son of David; He was the promised deliverer. They mistook what was the problem from which he came to deliver them, but God still heard and received their praise.

Does that describe us too? We sing these words, perhaps never thinking about them, but they are critically important. Like the confirmation vows we probably took when we were 14 and had little idea what we were promising, these sorts of things have a way of coming true. **We** welcome the promised Son of David in this Sacrament. We sing his praise, as is right and good, but we should not think that we control this salvation or that he has come to be our pet savior. His grace, mercy, Word, and kingdom are far beyond our control, and that is good.

We ask the Lord to save us. He hears our prayers. But He sees our ultimate problem as sin, the sin from Adam and Eve that we were conceived in and born into, and the sin we have committed and lived in ever since. We, on the other hand, see the mess we have made and the fix we have gotten ourselves into, as our ultimate problem. And we seek that temporal solution. We think of God as our fairy Godmother, or a genie in a bottle, ready to grant every wish.

Jesus has saved us from eternal death and destruction and guarantees our everlasting health and happiness. We seek to prolong **this** deteriorating life and obtain whatever poisonous fruit our lying eyes lay hold of.

But the Holy Spirit comes to us through Baptism and the Word and engenders in the hearer, in us, the same humility and love which drove Jesus to his death upon a cross for the sake of the whole world.

That same Holy Spirit takes us out of our minds. That phrase is frightening. We might think it means that we have lost our mind, but this is a different "being out of our minds."

This is a putting on the mind of Christ, or better said, He is putting on ourselves, taken us to himself, so that we will be in Christ, through Baptism, giving us his name, taking up residence in our lives so that our mind is being renewed in Christ (Romans 12) and we take on the mind of Christ. We are changed, reborn! It is a metanoia, a change of heart and mind, not visible from the outside, but acting upon the very essence of who we are. Inhabiting the same shell of a body, we children of men are made into children of the Heavenly Father!

No, we don't want to seek a death by crucifixion. Save us we still pray. But we want to have the same heart and mind which Jesus had, which Paul exhorts us toward. We want to put the other first, to love our neighbors as ourselves. That same heart and mind will manifest itself in a variety of ways in the lives of people, according their vocations and differing gifts. It manifests in how we treat one another. It draws us to His gifts of Word and Sacrament.

Palm Sunday remembers the day when Jesus came long ago to save the world. Today we walked between the palm fronds and sang Hosanna, Loud Hosanna, remembering that Jesus still comes to us today, in Word and Sacrament, to save us...just like He did so many years ago. When Paul exhorts us to have Jesus within us, it is not so far-fetched as one might think. It happens every time you put your hand out at this rail. Jesus, his very body, and his very blood, given and shed for you, comes to take up residence inside of you.

And when we remember our Baptisms, in which we were slain with Jesus, and with him raised to a new life, a life which is defined by Him, by his death, and by his sacrifice for us. That life has a mind, the mind of Christ. Those words of grace spoken from the cross – forgiveness for the criminal beside Him, the injunction to care for the bereaved mother, the forgiveness even for the one who pounded the nails into His body, those words become words to us and for us and in us in Christ's death and resurrection. Baptized into **his** death, raised with him to new life, this becomes something of our experience too. We are now people who sacrifice, serve, love, and give of ourselves. It is not something we do to earn, but something we become.

This is NOT something that we must to do, nor can we do it. Jesus does this. Jesus and his Spirit work this change in our lives. Jesus proclaims what He has done; He does not prescribe to us what we are supposed to do. We confess that we are only witnesses to Jesus at work in our lives. That passion, death, and resurrection then shows up in our lives too. Not removing us from the pain and brokenness and tragedy of this fallen world, but joining us in it and taking it upon His shoulders, suffering and dying for us, so that looking at Him and trusting in Him, we might not die eternally. No fairy Godmother is He, no genie, nor vending machine. Jesus Christ is the Redeemer from death that only the One, True God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit could conceive. A man to take our place, and God to save us all. Hosanna! Amen!

May the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting. Amen!