

PASSION (PALM) SUNDAY 2017

With Palm Sunday we begin Holy Week - the centre of the Church's whole year - in which we accompany Jesus in His Passion, Death and Resurrection. But what does it mean for us to live Holy Week? To follow Jesus on his way to the Cross on Calvary and the Resurrection?

In his earthly mission, Jesus walked the roads of the Holy Land; he called simple men and women to be with him, to share his journey and continue his mission. Beyond this circle of friends he spoke to everyone without distinction: the great and the lowly; the rich young man and the poor widow. He brought the mercy and forgiveness of God to all: he healed, he comforted, he understood, he gave hope. He led all into the presence of God the Father who is interested in every one of us, like a good mother or father is interested in each child.

In Jesus, God did not wait for us to go to him, he came towards us. This is how God is: He is always the first to make a move. Jesus lived the daily realities of most ordinary people: he was moved by the crowds that seemed like a flock without a shepherd; he cried upon the death of his friend Lazarus; he suffered the betrayal of a friend. In Christ, God has given us the assurance that He is with us, in our midst. His mission is to be the loving presence of God among us.

In Holy Week we live the highest point of this journey, this loving plan of God. Jesus enters Jerusalem to take the final step in which he gives Himself totally, keeping nothing back, not even his life. At the Last Supper and on the cross he consigns his body and his blood into our hands to be with us always. On the Mount of Olives and in the trial before Pilate, he puts up no resistance, he gives himself freely. Saint Paul says that Jesus "loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Each one of us can say that on the Cross "Jesus loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*".

What does this mean for us today? It means that living Holy Week is not just following Jesus with the sentiments and emotions of our heart. It means imitating Jesus, learning how to come out of ourselves, how to give ourselves, how to reach out to others, how to be the first to move towards our brothers and sisters, especially those who are most in need of mercy, understanding, consolation and love. Living Holy Week means learning to think and live how God thinks and lives. It means entering into God's logic - the logic of the Cross - which is not primarily about pain and death, but about love and self-giving which brings life.

Following and accompanying Christ requires stepping outside of ourselves, stepping out of the temptation to withdraw into ourselves. God stepped outside of himself to come among us, to bring us the mercy of God that saves and gives hope. This is how we truly live Holy Week: by stepping out of ourselves like Jesus, like God has stepped outside of Himself in Jesus and like Jesus stepped outside of himself for all of us.

You might say "But I have no time, I'm so busy" or "What can I do with my little strength and all my sins?". I assure you I sometimes feel this way too. It's so easy to settle for a few prayers, for coming

to Sunday Mass, and doing a random act of charity. But this truly lacks the courage of "stepping outside" and bringing the mercy and love of God to others.

We can all be a bit like Saint Peter. As soon as Jesus speaks of his passion and death, of self-giving love, Peter takes him aside and says: "No Lord, choose another way ... choose an easier way!" Jesus responds to Peter with some of the strongest words in the Gospel: "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do" (Mk 8:33). God thinks like the Good Samaritan who does not just sympathise with the beaten man or say a prayer for him but rescues him without asking for anything in return. God thinks like the shepherd who gives his life to defend and save his sheep.

Holy Week is a special time of grace which the Lord gives us to *open the doors* of our hearts, our lives, our homes, and our parishes, not only to let others in but more for us to "step outside" towards others, to draw close to them and bring them the light and joy of our faith.

[Based on Pope Francis First General Audience 27 March 2013](#)