

Palm Sunday - A  
Isaiah 50: 4-7;  
Philippians 2: 6-11;  
Matthew 26:14- 27:66  
Little Flower - 4/5/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

This Lent has probably been the most challenging Lent of our lives. Today we begin the holiest week of the Church year, and for the first time in our lives, unable to come together in person to celebrate Holy Week.

Today we celebrate Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. On Holy Thursday, we will celebrate his Last Supper with his disciples during which he instituted the sacraments of Eucharist and Priesthood. On Good Friday, we will commemorate his Passion and Death. Finally, on Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, we will celebrate his triumphant resurrection from the dead.

Even if we unable to celebrate together, I think it will be important for all of us to celebrate Holy Week as best as we can. Our inability to come together to worship as the Little Flower family and our inability to receive the sacraments will probably be more painful this week and on Easter Sunday than they have been these last few weeks. However, as Archbishop José Gomez, the President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, wrote, "Our churches may be closed, but Christ is not quarantined and his Gospel is not in chains. Our Lord's heart remains open to every man and woman. Even though we cannot worship together, each of us can seek him in the tabernacles of our own hearts."<sup>1</sup>

Only once before have I given a homily on Palm Sunday. Along with many other priests, I have always thought that my words would only take away from the power of the Passion. However, I have often wondered if we may have heard the story so many times that we no longer think about how real the suffering of Jesus was.

Several year ago, Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* had everyone thinking and talking about Jesus' suffering and death. In that movie, Gibson chose to emphasize the physical sufferings of Jesus. In his review of the movie, Fr. Ron Rolheiser offered an interesting critique. According to Fr. Rolheiser, the Gospel authors do not emphasize Jesus' physical sufferings "but emphasize instead the emotional and moral loneliness of Jesus. In the gospels, Jesus' primary sufferings have to do with being betrayed, misunderstood, alone, humiliated, and unanimity-minus -one. Indeed in several accounts of the passion, the physical suffering[s] of Jesus are expressed in a single line: 'And they led him away and crucified him.'"<sup>2</sup>

I have a friend who was an Air Force pilot. (For those of you who are interested in airplanes, she flew a KC-135, one of the big refueling planes.) Although her family attended church when she was growing up, she was never particularly religious. However, after she saw *The Passion of the Christ*, she bought a Bible. This was the first time she was strongly attracted to Christ. However, what attracted her to Jesus and made her want to learn more about him was not his sufferings but the moment in the movie when Jesus looked up and asked for God's forgiveness even for those who were finding joy in torturing and killing him. She found his love so amazing.

My brothers and sisters, during this Holy Week, let us pray for all those who are suffering physically, emotionally, spiritually, morally, and financially because of the coronavirus. However, may we also imitate Jesus' merciful love for his crucifiers by our compassion toward all who are suffering during this pandemic. Finally, during this Holy Week, even in the midst of the coronavirus, let us not forget to be thankful. Archbishop Gomez reminds us, "But we know that our Redeemer lives. Even in this extraordinary and challenging moment, we give thanks for what Jesus Christ has done for us by his life, death, and resurrection. Even now, we marvel at the beautiful mystery of our salvation, how precious each one of us is in the eyes of God."<sup>3</sup>

1. Archbishop José Gomez, “President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Releases Message for Holy Week 2020,” April 3, 2020, <http://www.usccb.org/news/2020/20-55.cfm>.

2. Fr. Ron Rolheiser, “Mel Gibson’s Passion of Christ,” April 18, 2004, <https://ronrolheiser.com/mel-gibsons-passion-of-christ/#.XoeOeHJICUk>.

3. Gomez, *op. cit.*