

We just read the narrative of Christ's Passion according to St. Matthew so that we hear again and are reminded of the events and details that Matthew records for us of Christ's final days in Jerusalem before His Crucifixion. The readings throughout Holy Week lead us through the passion narratives from the other gospels so that we get the fullest perspective that we can from these sacred accounts. The gospels are four witnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ provided to us by the grace of God.

It is interesting that on this Palm Sunday, we don't read about the Triumphal Entry of Christ into Jerusalem as the primary gospel lesson, but we did read it this morning as part of our procession with the palms. The Triumphal Entry rather is the primary gospel lesson for the first Sunday of Advent. Why is this? Because when Christ comes again, the whole of creation will cheer and shout its adoration for the eternal and celestial King, and Advent points us to that second coming. Christ came first as the representative of the human race, as our representative, for He became human, He entered personally into creation, through His Incarnation.

This morning we revisit the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem with those same shouts of acclamation, but more particularly in relation to the cross that Christ was to be executed upon at the end of the week. Those shouts of welcome and hope would be turned to shouts of anger and malice just a few short days hence. Christ came to us as our divine representative, but now Christ comes to us as our sacrifice, our redeemer. I would encourage every one here to follow the readings appointed for each day this week. Let your minds and hearts return again to the Jerusalem of 2000 years ago. Watch with Christ, experience His love for us by returning to the details of His death for us and mourn. Mourn for His suffering, mourn for the injustice – that an innocent and perfect man would die for the sins of everyone else - and mourn your sin which caused His death. And then be grateful for the love of God.

As the readings this week recount the details of the death of Christ, today's epistle lesson from the letter of St. Paul to the Philippians steps back to gain a more thematic perspective on the Passion and Resurrection of Our Lord. Paul is not in this brief passage recounting the details of these events, but he is focused upon the meaning of them for us. We receive in this writing more of a theological understanding than a story.

What are the key points that the Apostle emphasizes? Though easily passed over, I believe that the very first sentence of this reading is perhaps the most important. The lesson begins, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." In other words, as followers of Christ, the Anointed One, we are called to become like Christ. These aren't abstract concepts to be held at a distance, but they are set before us to embrace, to make them our own. We seek, through our study of God's Word, through our times of corporate worship, through the sacramental life, through our daily life, in which we both devote our souls to God and in which we interact with the world, to incarnate Christ fully, just like He incarnated us, humanity, fully. St. Paul is here echoing his epistle to the Romans, chapter 12

in which he says, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” That renewing of the mind is that we should have the mind of Christ.

St. Paul's second key point here is that Christ, even though He was God, of the same substance and being of God, co-equal, co-eternal, and fully divine, did not grasp for all the rights or prerogatives of His being. Rather, He emptied Himself of these privileges by becoming a human being. It is important to note here that Christ did not somehow choose not to be divine. In His Incarnation, Christ remained, and remains, fully God and fully man at all times, in order to redeem the fullness of human experience. To interpret this passage to suggest that Christ suspends His deity to become human is to undermine the atonement. This is referred to as the heresy of Kenosis, which comes from the word used here by St. Paul to describe that Christ gave up the His due rights and privileges as God; but it is not that Christ gave up being God. Orthodoxy asserts that all of the characteristics of God – omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, eternality, and others – are retained by Christ at all times. As God, He deserved to be treated as God. Yet for our sakes, He was treated as a commoner, and worse than a commoner, as a criminal, abused by all – even by the two criminals executed with Him.

Strength is found not in demanding what is deserved, but in refusing to assert what is by right one's own due. For example, Christ was never angry about how He was treated. We know that Christ was angry about how Israel treated God; He was zealous for the honor of His Father, but He did not insist on His own honor. He was angry with Israel's religious leaders for how they abused the people and misguided them, but He did not fault them for the treatment He personally received save in that as they denied Him, they denied the Son of God and therefore God Himself. In all of His interactions, Christ honored others before Himself, for Christ truly loved others, and love points us to consider the good of others before the comfort and honor of oneself. This is true humility, and it is the humility of Christ that is our example and our goal.

It is important to note that such humility, such forgetting about one's own benefits for the sake of others is not without a larger purpose. It is not a self-abasement for the point of getting others to notice how generous one is, and it is not a self-loathing either. It is, rather, being so motivated by love for God, that God's purposes supersede our own. It is knowing that God is working in the world through our obedience. It is a confidence in the goodness and justice of God who will make all things right and just in due time. St. Paul notes this as well. Christ did not assert his majesty and kingship in His first Advent, so that the redemption of the world would be accomplished. Christ trusted in God to exalt Him as God saw fit, even knowing that the obedience God asked of Him would lead to the cross. It would lead Him to the most reviled and tortuous death, reserved for the most condemned individuals. And all of this for love's sake. Christ willingly went to the cross because Christ

unquestioningly trusted in God the Father.

Christ trusted God even when it all seemed to be falling apart. He never doubted, but went to the cross as a lamb led to the slaughter, knowing that God was doing something that no one yet could understand. “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name.” The perfect humility and obedience of the God-man Jesus Christ is rewarded with everything in Creation. All things are of Him, in Him, and through Him. And all of the heavens above, the earth beneath, and the deepest extent of hell will submit to Jesus Christ in the due course of events as governed by the Father. Every being that can worship, will worship our Lord Jesus Christ, Our Anointed Savior: some—us—with eternal rejoicing, and others with hateful submission to Him who is over all. Christ's complete obedience brought about complete honor and glory.

And this is path which we are called to embrace. This is the mind that we are to have. That all of the things in our lives, both the blessings, and more particularly the curses and trials, must be received in obedience with the love of God. We are not to depersonalize the Passion of Christ. We are to enter into it. We must let it shape us. Being a follower of Jesus means following Him in humility. It means following Him in trust. It means ordering one's life in the love of God by the grace of the Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit. And as we are in Christ, so too will we be resurrected with Christ to honor and glory in the due time appointed by the Father.

How do we do this? Through Faith, and that not of yourselves; through the faith that is the gift of God to us. We assert that the cross of Jesus is our life for in it is our death and our resurrection. But more than mere intellectual acknowledgment, we follow in the path of Christ Through Belief, through how our faith is worked out in our thoughts, words, and deeds.

So the question put to us this morning is, “Are you willing to take on the mind of Christ?” Then believe with your mind and follow in the humility of our Lord Jesus Christ. Show forth your faith in ordering your life around God. Receive the trials that come our way out of love for Christ. Speak the truth in love to those around us, and receive what abuse they might lay upon us out of patience and love, not through endless argumentation and aggression.

Today's collect beautifully summarizes St. Paul's epistle for us. It begins with what Jesus has done, emptying himself in humility through His Incarnation and in His Passion so that He would be highly exalted by God. We are then called to follow in His path: through the mercy and grace of God, to follow in Christ's Patience so that we would partake of His Resurrection by our resurrection. The sin of this world is overcome through the loving obedience to God trusting completely that God would give us fullness of eternal life in the next world. Let us make this prayer our own. Let us manifest this prayer to the world in our attitudes and actions.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility; Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.