

Homily for April 5, 2020 on Redemptive Suffering

Isaiah 50: 4-7; Psalm 22: 8-24; Philippians 2: 6-11; Matthew 26: 14-27: 66

The restrictions due to the corona virus has prevented us from assembling for Passion Sunday. We can still remember what Passion Sunday signifies to us. Two of the Gospels from the weekday Masses of the Fifth Week of Lent catch my attention. In one Gospel Jesus condemns the religious leaders of the Jewish people for refusing to recognize the Messiah. The question that occurred to me was, "How could those who spent their lives in religion miss the Christ standing right in front of them?" I am convinced that they their fatal flaw resulted from their deciding that they had all the answers among themselves and within themselves. We can easily make this mistake ourselves. God's Presence in the world is far greater than we could ever imagine. His Power is deeper than we could ever achieve ourselves. Wrapped up in themselves, the Jewish leaders missed the Power and Presence of the Lord. If we are wrapped up into ourselves, we will also miss His Presence.

Last Friday Pope Francis stood facing an empty St. Peter's Square, speaking to millions around the world watching through broadcasts and online. The square was empty but everywhere hearts were full not only of fear and grief but also of love. In his beautiful *Urbi et Orbi* homily, he reminded us that the coronavirus pandemic has united our common humanity. "We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together," he said.

No corner of the world is untouched by this pandemic, no life unaffected. According to the World Health Organization, nearly a million people have been

infected and more than 46,000 have died. By the time this is over, the global death toll is expected to be millions. When we are following all the given directives of Government health officials, and church officials, we will be one among those who are alive to thank God for our life and everything else.

The second Gospel from this week that caught my attention contained Jesus' proclamation that when He is lifted up He would draw all people to Himself. The suffering of our Lord was necessary for all people. Christianity is not just a belief system for a select group of people. All people are saved by Jesus Christ, even good people searching for God, who have not received the grace to become Christian. By dying on the cross, Jesus re-established mankind's ability to be united to God. Jesus' death gives all people spiritual life. This is what we mean when we use the term: redemptive suffering.

In the mystery of the Redemptive Suffering of the Lord, we participate in the cross of Christ. St. Paul put it this way in his Letter to the Colossians: "in my body I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of His Body, which is the Church." We all are. We all are making up for what is lacking. But how can there be a deficiency in Christ's sacrifice? The answer is this: we are entrusted with the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. The only way we can do this is by living the Life of Christ. That is why we are called Christians. We make Christ real in the world. Our living His Life includes our embracing His Sacrifice. We unite our pains and sorrows of today's isolation with the paschal mysteries of our Lord as our part in making the presence of the Suffering Saviour real in the world.

Whenever we experience any pain, thank God that we can feel them. Every pain reminds us that we are alive and susceptible to every feelings. I wish I could tell you that pain does not exist and that you can make it go away with your mind. The pandemic that is the corona virus has certainly reminded us of our human condition. Suffering is part of our lives. One of the great beauties of our faith is that there is value in every aspect of the Christian's life, even those aspects of life that are full of pain. Therefore, we give it all to the Lord. We give Him our joy and our pain. If our health is poor or failing, if our lives are not going as we hoped, whatever pain we have, we give it to Him. We unite everything to the cross, so others can experience the Sacrificial Love of Jesus in our lives. Let me ask you this, "Have you ever met a truly holy person?" If you have, and I am sure we all have, we cannot help but realize that for that person pain is secondary. The only thing that matters for him or her is Christ. Moreover, his or her very suffering provides us with the experience of Christ's Redemptive Presence. He or she is making up for what is lacking in the Cross of Christ: the participation of His people.

We focus on the cross today, and throughout this Holy Week. We unite our pains to Jesus' pains. We receive His healing through His Cross. We bring His healing to others by allowing them to experience the Power of the Cross at work in our lives. We are called to participate in Redemptive Suffering. Palm Sunday celebrations were the foreshadowing of paschal mysteries of Jesus. As we enrich ourselves with the joys of Palm Sunday, today, we will offer ourselves to be a part of Jesus Paschal mysteries throughout our lives. May God bless you+++.

Fr. Thomas