

Palm Sunday (B) March 24:

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

The Church celebrates this sixth Sunday of Lent as both Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. This is the time of year we stop to remember and relive the events that brought about our redemption and salvation. What we commemorate and relive during this week is not just Jesus’ dying and rising, but our dying and rising in Jesus, which will result in our healing, reconciliation, and redemption. Attentive participation in the Holy Week liturgy will deepen our relationship with God, increase our Faith, and strengthen our lives as disciples of Jesus. Today’s liturgy combines contrasting moments, one of glory, the other of suffering: the royal welcome of Jesus in Jerusalem, and the drama of the trial, culminating in crucifixion, death, and burial for the Christ.

The refrain for today’s responsorial (Psalm 22), “My God, My God, why have You abandoned Me?” plunges us right into the heart of Christ’s Passion. Hundreds of years before Christ, David gave an accurate description of the suffering the Messiah would endure. David was obviously going through great trials himself at the time, but through his suffering like the Messiah, he gained victory. Jesus quoted the same verse while hanging on the cross carrying our burden of sin. “And at three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, Lema Sabachthani?” (Which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15: 33-34). This was the most agonizing moment of the whole event of Jesus’ Passion. It is a piercing expression of Jesus’ pain and sorrow.

Yet Jesus is in full solidarity with humanity. That solidarity includes the experience of abandonment by God, the most difficult suffering we can experience. So many of the saints, like Mother St Teresa of Calcutta, experienced this abandonment. Yet, like Jesus, they also trusted and persevered in the midst of pain and suffering. In suffering, we can pray Psalm 22 with Jesus.

My beloved ones in Christ, this was not a cry of despair, not a cry of doubt, rather it is an urgent appeal to God for help. This Holy Week, I invite you to keep the words of Psalm 22 in your hearts.

Be My Witness: Small group sharing: Session 5: The Power of Prayer: We heard Tom and Amy’s story (Be My Witness, pages 46-48). Like Amy, it could happen that one stopped going to Mass due to the death of a loved one, divorce, a debilitating injury, maybe a tragic loss, an act of violence, the loss of a job, an unexplained accident, or some natural calamity that destroyed homes and lives. These are very hard to deal with. When bad things happen, sometimes we blame God, feel angry with ourselves, feel guilty, resentful, we feel angry at God, and many times one could find it difficult to turn to God for help. Christ cried on the cross with pain and agony.

In our story, Amy found spiritual support in her co-worker who visited her and invited Amy to pray with her. Her co-worker was definitely a woman of faith. At such difficult moments in life, when everything seems to bring tears, pains, resentment, anger, and more questions than answers, prayer is often the best, and sometimes the only action we can take to help others. Some of our best prayers begin when we admit that we need God, and we pour out all our pain, joy, anger, fear, questions, and doubts.

In every page of the texts today, Christ’s true identity and mission is revealed as Messiah, God. His humble entrance into Jerusalem, the Hosanna (save us now) from the people, the trial, torture, death on the cross, and his eventual rising to life, and those stirring eyewitness accounts of finding the empty tomb.

Christ demands a response: These are powerful looks into the life and story of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. We cannot just ignore the story because the life and events of Jesus Christ demand a response from us. You can either accept or reject it, you can either remain in doubt or believe, thus gaining eternal life with God. Whatever, and however you choose to respond to this story is up to you, and your response has eternal consequences.

O Holy Spirit, thank you for your love and presence in our lives. Fill us with your help and peace in the times of our needs. Give us the courage to respond positively to the promptings of your grace. Help us to know you and love you more deeply through our experience of the Holy Week events. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord who died on the Cross to bring us eternal life. Amen.

Fr Martin Ezeihuaku, MSP.