

Today, we begin Holy Week with Palm Sunday. Even though we are unable to gather as a congregation during Holy Week, I hope that you can celebrate Holy Week from your homes and join Fr. Novak, Deacon John, Alvez Barkoskie, and me on Facebook Live or YouTube. Let us continue to pray for those people in healthcare, and for the people sick from the virus.

If you pay attention to the liturgy today, you will notice that it has two parts that seem contradictory to each other. In the first part, we relive the event when Jesus enters Jerusalem like a king. The crowds welcome him. They spread cloaks and laid branches on the road shouting “Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” However, in the second part, we hear about the suffering of Jesus, especially in the story of the Passion of Jesus. The crowds want him to die that day, shouting “Crucify Him!” Jesus is also called a king, but now this king is crucified on the cross between two criminals.

It is through these contradictions that the church reminds us about the contradiction that exists in each human being. These same people who shouted Hosana, which means “save us now”, within days would become a mob shouting “Crucify Him!” The contradiction happened not only with the crowd, but also with the apostles. Judas, for example ate with Jesus and called him Master, but soon after betrayed Him for 30 pieces of silver. And Peter, the one who drew his sword to protect Jesus earlier, later denied Him three times in front of a female servant. This same thing happens to us. We pray very faithfully to God one day and we deny Him days later. So, we can see our images reflected in both the crowd and the apostles in the Gospel.

Today, the church also uses those contradictions to help us understand what kind of king Jesus is and the way of salvation Jesus invites us to follow. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he did not ride on a horse - a symbol of strength and military power, he rode on a donkey. The path he invites us to follow is not the way of war and violence but one of love and mercy. In this way, he shows us the image of a king of peace, a king of meekness and humility.

The image Jesus modeled for us is summarized beautifully by St. Paul in the second reading: “Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

So, today, on one hand, we know that a contradiction exists inside each of us. But, on the other hand we also know that we have a meek and humble king who sacrifices his life for us because he loves us. Whatever we have done, whoever we are, God always loves

us. We may stop loving Him, but He will never stop loving us. We may betray him and crucify him, but He always loves us with the same love, His ultimate love.

Today, as we live through the COVID-19 pandemic, we suffer in many ways but, we continue to hope and wait for the day when we will be free from this virus and have a new life. Let us remember that when we live in sinfulness, we suffer and we cannot get out of it on our own, but Jesus suffered and died for us so that through Him we can be free.

Dear brothers and sisters, as we begin Holy Week, we are invited to explore more about the image of the One who loves us so much; and at the same time, we are also invited to respond to his love. How do we respond? What attitudes do we have? Judas betrayed Jesus. He regretted it, but he did not believe that God's love was bigger than his sins, so he hung himself, dying in hopelessness. Peter denied Jesus three times. He knew that his sin was big, but believed that God still loved him, so he repented and followed Jesus.

Hopelessness or repentance: which one would we choose?

This question is for each of us to answer before God during this Holy Week.

Fr. Linh Bui
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