

PALM SUNDAY

Mt 21.1-11 to Mt 26.14-27.66 Is 50.4-7 Phil 2.6-11

As we gather again in prayer as a real community, near and far, but virtually present to each other at this uncertain time, let's acknowledge the beauty of life and love, family and friendship, of which we are even more focussed and appreciative at an uncertain, and frankly, frightening time like this, given the global Coronavirus pandemic crisis.

Lord Jesus, you show us the way to peace in our hearts as we turn to you in faith and trust. Lord have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you challenge us to be people of hope, especially in difficult times of our lives as we experience now. Christ have mercy.

Lord Jesus, as we prepare to celebrate Holy Week and your path to the Passion and Cross, guide us along the twisting and uncertain paths of our lives, as we follow you and share your love. Lord have mercy.

This weekend's two Gospels remind us of the fickle nature of the human heart and mind, with the crowds enthusiastically welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem, waving the palms and joyfully offering him adulation and praise. Then, the sharp and contradictory turnaround comes not long later, with the crowds led on by misguided and hypocritical, even evil religious and pliable and probably corrupt political leaders, threatened by the truth and goodness of Jesus, and what they see as his threat to their authority, his mind and will firmly focussed on his ultimate fatal destiny, in human terms. And yet, as we Christians know, this is not the end of the story.

This is the most dramatic and dark story in each of the four Gospels, but culminating in the victory of life over death, but the darkness has to be faced first. It is a reflection on the complexity of who we are as humans, and the challenge to seek truth, face our mortality, something of which we are very conscious in the present crisis. And so there is our responsibility to live our lives well as his faithful, if flawed followers.

There is the perfidy of Judas the traitor, yet one chosen initially by Jesus as a presumed faithful follower, 30 pieces of silver (*into our secular lexicon as a symbol of betrayal!*) not amounting to nothing in the end, the apostles' flight into the darkness in fear, after the physical attack on the guard, followed by Jesus' predictable rejection of further violence, Peter's wimpish denial, the cock crowing thrice, to his shame, guilt and all too late remorse, all emotions and reactions to which you and I can readily relate.

Then there is the stark injustice of what is effectively a kangaroo court, the mocking of the man of absolute integrity and truth, the irony of the crown of thorns (*into our secular lexicon as the accursed starfish on the Great Barrier Reef!*), countered by, yet the crown as a symbol of kingship, but of the kingdom of justice, love and peace Jesus proclaims throughout his ministry and mission.

Once again, it is the faithful women who are there to the end, at the Cross and then the tomb, as we look forward to the coming events commemorating his Passion and Death, but then fullness of life and encounter with the Risen Jesus.

We look for hope and renewal in our time out now, preparing for these events at the heart of our faith, but in a unique and very different way this year.

There are palms blessed at this week's virtual Palm Sunday Mass, outside both side doors of St Therese's Church. You are welcome to come and take a branch home as a reminder at any time from now. Please ensure you maintain your physical/social distance of 1.5m from each other meanwhile.

We will also have a virtual Holy Thursday service on our Essendon parish website, where there will also be links to on-line Stations of the Cross, both contemporary and traditional, and also a virtual Good Friday service for the afternoon. And an Easter Mass will be available on-line from 6.00pm on Holy Saturday evening.

As we know, the Project Compassion theme this year is "Go Further Together". Please continue to support the work of Caritas, by sending your contributions directly. Information is on parish website, and further stories of the projects supported by our contributions are readily available on the Project Compassion website. Please don't forget to keep contributing during this difficult, uncertain and trying time, as I reiterate appreciation for your ongoing generosity.

john hannon

5th April 2020

PROJECT COMPASSION PRAYER

God of all peoples and nations, as you accompany us on our Lenten journey, may our fasting strengthen our commitment to live in solidarity, our almsgiving be an act of justice, and our prayers anchor us in love and compassion. Awaken our hearts and minds that we might be one human family as we all go further together. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

NOTES FROM CARITAS AUSTRALIA FOR PALM SUNDAY

The Holy Week story highlights the struggle for communion and solidarity in the midst of great challenges, injustice and suffering. Today's gospel readings offer us great contrast. We can see ourselves in the crowds amongst those who were jubilant, crying '**Hosanna**' as Jesus enters Jerusalem to then find the crowd shouting '**Crucify him**' just a few days later. Like Peter, Judas and the other disciples, we too can be fickle followers of Jesus.

In the Passion we see the suffering of Jesus as he is beaten, scourged and ridiculed. He is treated unjustly as a notorious thief is chosen for release over Jesus. Jesus is deserted by his closest friends and it is only a Gentile centurion, Mary and a group of faithful women who remain at the foot of the cross. At the end, Jesus even feels deserted by his Father asking '**why have you abandoned me?**'

In the Project Compassion story this week Dominic shares how he was liberated from his pattern of domestic violence. Just as Mary and the faithful women remained at the foot of the cross with Jesus, Dominic's wife and family chose to remain with him on his journey to wholeness. His participation in the Caritas Australia supported program at the Center of Hope in Papua New Guinea brought light back to his family. By opening himself up to the process of counselling with Christophylda, his wife, he was able to learn new ways to manage his behaviour and attitudes, bringing new life to his family where there was once fear and darkness.

Dominic is also bringing change to his community as he now works as an advocate, challenging gender-based violence and sharing his testimony of

change. Having people speak from their own experience leads others to challenge their own behaviour through its authenticity.

“After entering the Caritas program, I have actually changed some of my bad attitudes. It has really opened my mind and heart to see where my weaknesses are and I’m trying to improve,” Dominic says.

Please help support the Safe House project and help bring greater harmony to families in Papua New Guinea. A brighter future for men, women and their families can start today. Let’s Go Further, Together.

We can identify with much of Jesus’ suffering, in our own lives and the lives of people close to us. We can take comfort and consolation in that Jesus identifies with the suffering of the human race. We now know that the story doesn’t end there, that there is the resurrection yet to come. Sadness and death give way to new life.

As we journey through Holy Week, will we keep in mind our sisters and brothers who suffer?