

PALM SUNDAY – A (April 2, 2023)

No matter how many times we hear or read this story, these actual historical events: if we are paying any attention at all, we can't help but feel speechless. What can we say or do in response to what Jesus endured for our sake? I suggest that we spend some time and prayer at least on occasion with the second reading from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians. In this passage Paul affirms the divinity—the “God-ness” of Jesus. But he didn't cling to his divinity only; ‘rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave... and found human in appearance.’”

Jesus emptied himself, ‘he humbled himself’ and took on our human nature that can and does suffer in so many ways. St. Matthew's account of the Passion that we just proclaimed gives many examples:

- He prayed in the garden that his Father would let the suffering that was coming his way pass him by; he did not look forward to the horrible pain and agonies he would endure the next day...yet he then simply said “yet, not as I will, but as you will”;
- He endured the pain of betrayal at the hands of Judas, one of his closest friends and disciples, and the pain of Peter denying three times that he even knew him—precisely as Jesus had predicted at the Last Supper;
- He was tortured by whips and scourges and crowned with razor-sharp thorns to hurt and humiliate him as much as possible;
- And there are no words to adequately describe the pain that crucifixion inflicts on its victims. No wonder Jesus cried out in genuine desolation “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Finally, he could only cry out again and, as Matthew tells us, ‘he gave up his spirit’—in other words, he died.

Jesus ‘emptied himself’. He most certainly did...down to the last drop of his most Precious Blood. Sometimes you'll hear or read about a close, hard-fought football game or other sporting event—and the announcers say something like “those players really left everything out there on the field”. Well, Jesus left everything out there on the field of Calvary. He gave us everything he had: his words, his teaching, the power of his miracles, the beauty of his mercy and forgiveness, the promise of eternal life and joy in his kingdom...and most amazing and incomprehensible of all, he even gave us the sacrifice of his very own life. He died—for you, for me, for every one of your loved ones, for every one you don't like or who has hurt you. And yes, Jesus died even for everyone who rejects him and instead gives him/herself over to sin, evil and selfishness.

“Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God...he emptied himself...he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” I've included this passage from Philippians in today's bulletin; I encourage you to spend some time in prayer with this passage—especially during this Holy Week which we begin today, but throughout the rest of the year as well. The more you do this, the more you let these words, these truths sink in, the more you will realize the enormity of what Jesus' self-emptying is all about and just how fundamentally life-changing and eternity-changing it is. If we take Jesus seriously, our lives will change and will become more like his which is what he so very much desires for us now and eternally. Are we willing to empty ourselves of our pettiness and self-centeredness so as to make more room to be filled with Jesus—he who left everything out there for us on the field of Calvary?