

Homily for Palm Sunday, Year C

April 13, 2025

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

Gospel at the Procession: Luke 19:28-40 (The triumphal entry into Jerusalem.)

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7 (I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.)

Responsory: Psalm 22 (My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?)

Second Reading: Philippians 2:6-11 (Christ emptied himself to the point of death.)

Gospel: Luke 22:14-23:56 (The Passion according to Luke.)

It has been said that each of the four gospels is really a passion narrative with a lengthy introduction and a brief epilogue. In other words, the story of Jesus Christ is, first and foremost, the story of his *sacrifice*. All of his ministry, his teachings, and his miracles are a prelude to the *Way of the Cross*. And the handful of stories which follow the crucifixion are the aftermath, revealing that the cross ultimately leads to resurrection and new life, for Jesus and for all of us.

The Passion narrative according to *Luke*, which we heard this year, reveals Jesus to us with a remarkable clarity. We really see who Jesus is, why he came into the world, how he understood his mission, and what sort of man he was.

The story begins at the Last Supper, that moment of great intimacy that Jesus shared with his closest disciples. As Jesus celebrates a modified version of the Passover ritual, speaking about the bread and wine as his own body and blood, his friends at table don't understand what all of this means. But, *we do*. We know that Jesus is showing them how all the faithful in future generations will be able to share in the sacrifice that *he is about to offer* in the coming hours. Through the sacrament of the Eucharist, all future believers will be able to enter into the mystery of his passion, death and resurrection and share in the fruits of that one, perfect sacrifice.

After the meal, they cross over to the Mount of Olives, where Jesus experiences his "Agony in the Garden." One could argue that this episode is actually the heart of the Passion narrative, for this is where Jesus makes his *final decision* to hand over his life in obedience to the Father's will. All of the gospel writers give a rather terse account of the crucifixion itself. They spare us most of the gory details. Luke doesn't even include a despairing cry of, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" Instead, he brings us into the mind and heart of Jesus *as he prays in the Garden*, before his arrest. Luke says, "his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground," as he prayed. Although not a single nail has pierced his flesh yet, Jesus is already experiencing the emotional anguish of the crucifixion. He looks squarely at the horror that awaits him, and he says, "Father, *thy will be done*."

Jesus remains mostly silent during his three trials – before the Sanhedrin, before Pilate, and before Herod. He offers no defense to the false charges and no objection to the mocking and humiliating treatment. However, he *does* clarify the important matter of what sort of king he understands himself to be. Jesus scoffs at the idea of a temporal kingdom. He came not to

rule over *one* people and *one* nation, but to bring salvation to *all* peoples of *all* nations. Hence, he's not interested in glorified titles like, "King of the Jews," or even, "the Christ." He knows that his rightful place is seated at the right hand of the Father in heavenly glory. But, he also knows that his path to that glory must pass through the cross. And so, he makes no attempt to avoid it. This is not a matter of guilt or innocence, but of *purpose* and *mission*. Jesus was sent into the world to offer his life for sinners, and now his hour has come.

During his way of the cross, Jesus' compassion and mercy are on full display. He consoles the women who have come to mourn *for him*. He pardons the repentant thief crucified beside him, assuring him, "Today you will be with me in paradise." He even intercedes on behalf of *his executioners*, noting that they really don't understand the evil that they are doing. We have heard Jesus teach about forgiveness and mercy in many different settings, but there is no more convincing parable than *this*. Jesus is practicing what he preached. He is demonstrating his commitment to the Gospel by witnessing to it up to his final actions and his dying breath.

In Luke's gospel, Jesus' final words from the cross are an act of faith. He cries out in the words of Psalm 31: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." With these last words, filled with hope, Jesus shows us what gave him the courage to, "set his face like flint, knowing that he would not be put to shame." Despite the appearance of abandonment, Jesus maintained absolute confidence in his Father's love. Through all the suffering, all the pain, and all the humiliation, he knew that the Father was with him, waiting to receive his spirit when his *final* act of obedience was completed.

As we contemplate this horrific spectacle that played out in Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years ago, the one ray of light that truly shines through the darkness is Jesus' immense *love* for us sinners. We know that he endured all of this pain and suffering *for us*. In the words of St. Paul, "he *emptied* himself... he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." And so, what can we possibly do in response to such perfect, extraordinary, self-emptying love, poured out for our sake, to set us free? Well, Paul provides an answer. With all the faithful around the world, we *bend the knee* in adoration and confess with our tongue that *Jesus Christ is Lord*, to the glory of God the Father! Amen!