

***“Celebrating and Living the Paschal Mystery”***

Today we celebrate Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion and begin Holy Week. This week is the most sacred and the most important week of our liturgical year.

Through a continuous series of liturgies, we celebrate the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the union of our daily sufferings, deaths, and resurrections to His. In this union we find the heart and foundation of our faith as Christians – the Paschal Mystery.

In the Paschal Mystery, we are mindful that the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus continues to bring salvation to the world in and through our lives, through the willful union of our lives to His.

As we begin this Holy Week, I recommend and encourage you to read this book in the near future: **“The Jesus I Never Knew”** by Philip Yancey. This book will give you a fresh perspective on Jesus and make you think of Him in ways that will be new to you.

All of the thoughts that follow are taken from Yancey's book and specifically from Chapter 10, *“Death: The Final Week.”*

Not only is the resurrection central to our faith, but also the death of Jesus is central! Death is not just the way leading to resurrection, but the death of Jesus is a focal point for our faith in and of itself. Our God allowed God to be killed. We have a God who, at a certain point in our human planet Earth History, died! What is the meaning of this in terms of our faith?

Yancey says, “Of the biographies I have read, few devote more than ten percent of their pages to the subject's death – including biographies of men like Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi, who died violent and politically significant deaths. The Gospels, though, devote nearly a third of their length to the climactic last week of Jesus' life. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John saw death as the central mystery of Jesus.”

What does this centrality of the death of Jesus teach us? “In a sense, the paired thieves present the choice that all history has had to decide about the cross. Do we look at Jesus' powerlessness as an example of God's impotence or as a proof of God's love? The Romans, bred on power deities like Jupiter, could recognize little godlikeness in a crumpled corpse hanging on a tree. Devout Jews, bred on stories of a power Jehovah, saw little to be admired in this god who died in weakness and in shame. The cross redefines god as One who was willing to relinquish power for the sake of love. Jesus became, in Dorothy Solle's phrase, ‘God's unilateral disarmament.’ Power, no matter how well intentioned, tends to cause suffering. Love, being vulnerable, absorbs it. In a point of convergence on a hill called Calvary, God renounced the one for the sake of the other.”

The challenge of faith for us, in our day, is to follow the example of Jesus who in His humanity and divinity has shown us the way to eradicate evil from our world. M. Scott Peck writes, ‘I cannot be anymore specific about the methodology of love than to quote these words of an old priest who spent many years in the battle: “There are dozens of ways to deal with evil and several ways to conquer it. All of them are facets of the truth that the only way to conquer evil is to let it be smothered within a willing, living human being. When it is absorbed there like blood in a sponge or a spear into one's heart, it loses its power and goes no further.

“The healing of evil – scientifically or otherwise – can be accomplished only by the love of individuals. A willing sacrifice is required...I do not know how this occurs. But I know that it does.”

May these reflections help us to enter into the spirit of Holy Week. I encourage you to celebrate Jesus, not only on Easter Sunday, but join your Parish Family and participate in all the Triduum celebrations – Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil, and Easter Sunday.

These are our most sacred days. Take seriously the responsibility to make them holy and special for you and your family.