



PALM SUNDAY

Year A

Isaiah 50:4-7

Psalms 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24

Philippians 2:6-11

Matthew 26:14-27:66

Gathering

(An unlit candle, a Bible open to this week's gospel and a crucifix rest on a table covered with a red cloth.)

This week's readings call us to fully participate in the public ministry and Passion of Christ as we continue to connect to the mission of Jesus. We lingered last week with the story of Lazarus, Martha and Mary and Jesus' promise of life. How did you act in faith against some dark or death-dealing situation in life this past week?

Prayer

(The candle is lit. Members are invited to be silently attentive to the presence of God. After a time of quiet, members pray in two groups as follows.)

- I: Lord Jesus,
open our eyes to recognize you
as you walk beside us,
accompanying us
on our journey in life each day.
- II: Give us the same courage and

determination
that you needed
as you faced your future
and the people of Jerusalem.

All: Amen.

Excerpted from *Praying Each Day of the Year – Volume 1: January – April* by Nicholas Hutchinson, FSC, 1998, p. 149.

HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)

When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two questions: “What draws you to this gospel?” “Where do you resist this gospel?” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)

Reflection

As a church (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, n. 14) we preach “fully conscious and active participation” in Mass. Most of the time, we know exactly what to do: sing, pray, sit, listen, and kneel. And by participating in small Christian community, we even anticipate the readings of the coming Sunday. But sometimes familiarity may cause us to be too comfortable. This is not exactly full participation. This week, our active participation is put to a particular test. In the communal proclamation of the passion we, the assembly, are assigned the words, “Crucify him.” Uncomfortable yet?

Our Lenten journey is almost complete. Perhaps we have made special sacrifices or added additional service to others to deepen our remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. This week we celebrate his sacrifice played out. The Passion Sunday liturgy begins with a gospel that recognizes

Jesus as “king,” as “Son of David,” but by the end of the proclamation of the Passion, we have crucified him.

Yes, we crucify him in word and deed. But he gave, he gives, himself for our sakes. Understanding and accepting our role as sinner and saved allows us to enter more fully into his life, death, and resurrection. The Passion is not just historical narrative, but it is also our story of faith, the fruit of the earliest Christians reflecting deeply on the story of Jesus.

As we reflect prayerfully on his story in our time, we come to appreciate our own failings in faith. In tune with the flow of the two gospels this week, we see ourselves. We wave palms; we bless him as king, but we often become fickle about living in tune with God’s purpose. At times, we abandon God. And so, we fully participate in the brokenness of humanity.

And yet this celebration of the Passion is a mystery of hope. When we fully and actively participate in the Mass, we experience the fullness of our faith and the grace bestowed on us through the Eucharist. The self-offering of Christ is made flesh again and we can recognize him *fully, participating actively in his mystery of dying and rising.*

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ What is your experience during the Passion narrative?
- ◆ How does saying, “Crucify him,” make you feel about your participation in his death?
- ◆ How do you spend Good Friday?
- ◆ How fully conscious and active is your participation at Mass?

HEARING THE GOSPEL’S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: “What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?” “How are you/we being called to live in response to God’s word?” After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions

- ◆ Re-read the Passion accounts this week and make the effort to pray the Stations of the Cross this week.
- ◆ Learn about, endorse and support the work of the Charter for Compassion: www.charterforcompassion.org.
- ◆ Enter fully into the celebration of the Paschal Mystery this year by participating in all the Triduum services: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil.
- ◆ Contact Catholics Against Capital Punishment (www.cacp.org) to work to end capital punishment nationwide.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: “What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?” “What do you say to him in response?” The community pauses for a full five minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.)

Following this sharing, members join in singing, “Lift High the Cross.” The song may be found on the Internet When the song is complete, members pray as follows.)

Leader: Lord Jesus, at our baptism
we were marked for you
with the sign of the Cross.
May your cross inspire us
to act justly and love tenderly.
May the crosses in our lives
be for us
invitations for growth and new life
as we place our trust in you.
Renewed by your love,

may the way we live
proclaim you as Lord:
you who are the Way,
the Truth and the Life.

All: Amen.

Excerpted from *Praying Each Day of the
Year – Volume 1: January – April* by Nicholas
Hutchinson, FSC, 1998, p. 152.

(Members exchange a sign of peace.)

