

Dominica In Palmis De Passione Domini A

Lectio Divina by Fr. Randy Soto

I. Lectio

A. We begin today the Major Week of our Liturgical Cycle. God's Word invites us to contemplate the sorrowful Passion of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Mt in cycle A; Mc in B and Lk in C). Paradoxically, his Passion begins with a triumphant entrance to Jerusalem and those who acclaimed: - "*Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord*" turning against him will shout ever louder "*Crucify him! Crucify him!*" But in God's plan, suffering and death on the Cross are just the means through which Resurrection to Life Everlasting is achieved.

B. The new liturgy has simplified the rite of the Blessing of the Palms, and instead it has focused more on the actual procession. Our procession today, even in its simplest form is all about acclaiming Christ the King: the long awaited Messiah who finally enters in Jerusalem to accomplish our Redemption. The opening words of the commemoration of the Solemn Entrance in Jerusalem convey this message clearly.

C. The palms today are meant to be used as a sacramental which is blessed "so that we who joyfully follow Christ the King, by him we may be able to enter into the Eternal Jerusalem" (Prayer of Blessing A for the Palms). The above translation is my own, because I judge the one in the English Sacramentary to be rather loose. The text in the Editio Typica reads: *ut nos, qui Christum Regem exsultando prosequimur, per ipsum valeamus ad aeternum Ierusalem pervenire.* And the English Sacramentary reads: "Today we joyfully acclaim Jesus our Messiah and King. May we reach one day the happiness of the new and everlasting Jerusalem by faithfully following him." This translation, unfortunately, changes the original meaning and is misleading in two directions: a) It fails to show the existing connection between the actual procession (commemoration of Jesus triumphant entry in Jerusalem) and its sacramental signification of the eschatological entrance in Heaven; and b) it could lead to the understanding that salvation is a human effort alone (*by faithfully following him*) and not a response to the gratuitous gift of God's grace who has saved us in Jesus (*per ipsum*). NB: *Ipsum* in Latin is the accusative for both masculine and neuter singular, but the context of the prayer requires it to be taken as in reference to Christ and not to the action of *prosequimur*.

C. Our First reading comes from the first part of the Third Canticle of the Suffering Servant in Is 50. Historically, the Canticle is situated during Israel's captivity in Babylon. Towards the end of 40 long years of bondage, the Persians began to threaten Nebuchadnezzar's Empire. The events elevated the hope of the possibility to return to rebuild the Holy City of Jerusalem. Isaiah announced the coming of a mysterious suffering servant in the manner of an expiatory goat to forgive the sins of Israel and to bring them back to freedom. The Primitive Christian community identified immediately this suffering servant with Our Lord Jesus Christ and used him as a type for the mystery of Christ suffering death: "*I gave my back to those who strike me.*"

D. Psalm 22 delineates poetically the characteristics of this Suffering Servant, who suffers but who in the end triumphs over evil and death: *"my God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"*

E. St. Paul gives us today perhaps the earliest Christian Hymn ever composed. In his Letter to the Philippians, Paul describes masterfully the profundity of God's love for mankind: *"He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."* The kenotic event of the Incarnation resulted in Christ's death and death on a Cross, so that we may benefit from the energy of the Risen Lord. To genuflect at the Name of Jesus is to acknowledge his Lordship over all creation and is to confess Him as our only Savior.

F. We read this year Matthew's Passion. Perhaps, the most important highlight of his account is that Matthew gives great relevance to the obedience manifested by the Son of Man to the Father's Will. One by one the scenes of the Passion reveal the obtuseness of everyone and at the same time the magnanimity of Jesus Christ ever *"merciful, meek and humble of Heart:"*

III. *Meditatio*

A. The conspiracy against Jesus is nothing else but the fruit of envy and jealousy...For these, *Miserere Nostris;*

B. The anointing at Bethany manifests Jesus' love for us to the point of accepting death, with burial anointing included...*Gratias agimus tibi;*

C. The betrayal reveals Judas' sin of avarice as well as his misunderstanding concerning the mission of the Messiah... *Miserere Nostris;* Despite this hideous betrayal Jesus tenderly calls Judas, his Friend...*Gratias agimus tibi;*

D. The Last Supper shows even better this double feature: the Blood of Christ (*Gratias agimus tibi*) is outpoured for the forgiveness of sins...*Miserere nostris;*

E. Peter's denial warns us not to be so sure about ourselves, for deep inside we can all negate Jesus. Notwithstanding, Peter acknowledges his sin and weeps bitterly in an act of repentance ...*Miserere nostris;*

F. The scene of Gethsemane puts in evidence Peter's and the other's sin of sloth, though due to fragility and tiredness. The sin of violence is also portrayed as Peter cuts the high priest servant's ear off: for these... *Miserere nostris;* On the other hand, Jesus' readiness to do the Father's will gives us comfort, even though this means to suffer a despicable death... *Gratias agimus tibi;*

G. The arrest and the trial present the sins of treacherous lies and deceit committed by some members of the Sanhedrin who were resolved to do away with Jesus. Like them we continue to push Jesus away by self-deceiving and misguiding others...*Miserere nostris.* In the mean time, Jesus' silence is the more eloquent weapon to defeat lies. Moreover, he speaks only once, and that is to declare himself as the Son of God, who has come to redeem us...*Gratias agimus tibi;*

H. In the trial Pilate is ambivalent: He appears to be even of mind and temper as well as impartial but he acts cowardly and interest oriented. Don't we all lack a backbone when it comes to stand for the truth?...*Miserere nostris;*

I. The scenes of Jesus Sentenced to death and the subsequent passion present the sins of mockery (soldiers= *cloak, thorns, reed*), denial (Pilate =*I am innocent of that blood*);

cynism (Sanhedrin= let his blood fall upon us and our children); insulting (bystanders, Scribes, and bandits). Are not these sins still in our midst?...*Miserere nostri*;

J. Jesus dies on the Cross by abandoning himself totally to God. Jesus dies with Ps 22 in his lips. This psalm is a monument to those who put all their trust in God: *"for he has not despised nor disregarded the poverty of the poor, has not turned away his face, but has listened to the cry for help" ...Gratias agimus tibi.*

III. Oratio

A. We begin our celebration by acclaiming our King: *"Hosanna to the Son of David, the King of Israel. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest"* (EA). We implore our Heavenly Father to *"help us to bear witness to you by following his example of suffering and make us worthy to share in his resurrection."* (OP); as we offer our gifts, we pray that God: *"May the suffering and death of Jesus, your only Son, make us pleasing to you. Alone we can do nothing, but may this perfect sacrifice win us your mercy and love."* (PG). When we contemplate God's love for us we can exclaim: Oh happy paradox!: *"Though he was sinless, he suffered willingly for sinners. Though innocent, he accepted death to save the guilty. By his dying he has destroyed our sins. By his rising he has raised us up to holiness of life."* (Preface). At communion while receiving the Eucharist we place ourselves with Christ at Gethsemane to say: *"Father, if this cup may not pass, but I must drink it, then your will be done"* (CA). We conclude our celebration by asking God to prepare us to live out the Paschal Mystery: *"The death of your Son gives us hope and strengthens our faith. May his Resurrection give us perseverance and lead us to salvation"* (AC).

III. Contemplatio

A. From one of the most important mystics of the Church, behold a laud to contemplate the mystery of the Cross.

ODE TO THE REDEEMING CROSS
TERESA OF AVILA
(Translation by Fr. Randy Soto)

**Cross, rest of my life:
Be Thou most welcome**

**Oh Flag in which even the weak
Finds strength to be strong!
Oh, life of our death!
How well have Thou risen it.
Thou, the lion having tamed,
For by Thou his life was lost:**

Be Thou most welcome.

He who does not love Thee,
Captive and foreign to freedom remains.

He who wants to reach Thee,
Will ever deviate.

Oh happy source of Power!
In which there is no evil!

Be Thou most welcome.

Thou were the freedom
Of greatest bondage ever;
By Thou damage was repaired
At such costly remedy.
For with God Thou were the way
Of our happiness acquired:
Be Thou most welcome