

We begin our Holy Week celebration on this Palm Sunday. On this day Jesus enters Jerusalem to accept his fate. He enters the city as a king. He is not an earthly or worldly king, one of material wealth or might or one of arrogance. He enters as a humble and gentle king, a king of peace, simplicity, and of the poor.

Jesus makes this entrance to fulfill his Heavenly Father's will for his life. His Father's will is that Jesus will die on a cross to bring salvation to the world. To complete this purpose, Jesus, in his humility, abandons all to his Father. He doesn't abandon his Father, although we see him struggle in the garden of Gethsemane. The temptation to reject his Father's will is there. Instead, he abandons and detaches himself from all earthly allurements to give himself completely to the Father. In true freedom, in his human nature, Christ makes this entrance, knowing the fate that awaits him. He stays the course.

In abandoning himself to the Father, Christ will be betrayed, he will be denied, he will be humiliated and mocked. Expecting these things would normally bring fear to the point of turning back. However, for Jesus, in the end, none of this will discourage him. We see this reflected in the reading from Isaiah: "I have not rebelled, have not turned back." Jesus enters Jerusalem because of the great love for his father and for each of us. In accepting his Cross, Jesus will win salvation for those who believe and stay faithful. In his human nature, Jesus shows complete trust and faith in his heavenly Father.

We follow Jesus into Jerusalem today. At this time, we are reminded to recognize our need for God's mercy because of our sinfulness. Holy Week is that call to now journey with Christ to Calvary and know that salvation is our goal, our aim throughout our earthly lives. This goal drives us to change our selves and our lives, to become the holy people God calls us to be. We are called not to get caught up in the allurements of the world, but in God's call to a life of goodness, kindness, and mercy.

We are also reminded that we, too, are called to carry our crosses during this most stressful time; Holy Week reinforces this part of our faith journey. We struggle in different ways because of a situation that is out of

our control. God knows our burdens and crosses are difficult, and he does not get joy in seeing us suffer. He knows we must suffer in some ways because of the broken and fallen world we live in. But the crosses we bear should not cause us to lose faith or have troubled hearts.

Yes, we want this ordeal to end, so that we can return to our lives before the pandemic. But as with Christ, we must persevere through this time, trusting that God has not abandoned us. We reach out and ask for his help, knowing his Son journeys with us.

I recently reread a book, *He Leadeth Me*. It was written by Fr. Walter Ciszek. Fr. Ciszek experienced the most trying times one could face in life. He spent over 15 years in prison and work camps under the most harsh of conditions inside the Soviet Union, experiencing loneliness, hunger, depression, and interrogations. Through his great suffering he found a purpose and meaning. He writes, "A spirituality based on a complete trust in God is the surest guarantee to freedom of the spirit and peace of the soul. In this spirituality the soul must learn to not act on its own initiative but in response to the demands that God imposes in the concrete situations of our daily life. Whatever the demands are – loneliness, illness, hunger, sickness – the consciousness of fulfilling God's will in accepting them makes the sacrifice easy and the burden light."

Christ found strength because he was doing God's will. Fr. Ciszek found strength in doing God's will. We can and will find strength and inspiration because we are doing God's will in taking our Cross each day of our lives out of love for God and for others. We can express that love in tangible ways. Those crosses bring us to a closer relationship with God. Christ abandons himself totally; there is no looking back and there is no going back. He could have come down from the Cross and he could have walked away from it, but he freely chose to embrace it. So also for us; let us not look back or rebel against God, but in staying faithful and giving ourselves to the Lord may we stay the course and continue to walk this journey with Christ.

This week, find a crucifix in your house and look upon it. See in it God's expression of great and deep love for each of us. Let that cross unite us in

our struggles, knowing that we will prevail as Christ did. Let it bring us hope, inspiration and strength.

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