

Palm Sunday (A)

2nd April 2023

‘Our Most Sacred Week’

Is 50: *for my part I made no resistance, neither did I turn away*

Ps 21: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

Phil 2: *He was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross*

Mt 26–27 Passion according to Matthew.

Holy Week is now upon us! — the ‘great week’ as it is sometimes called. It’s not a particularly early Easter, this year, but even so, it may be that Holy Week has somehow still crept up on you — and suddenly we are cast into the turmoil with Jesus in the last days of His ministry in Jerusalem. Beginning today with His triumphant entry to shouts of *Hosanna*; then, the days of increasing tension with the authorities; the Last-Supper Passover celebration with the apostles, in which He institutes the sacred priesthood and the Blessed Sacrament of His presence with us in the Mass; then the rapid descent into the agony of the arrest, trial, Way of the Cross, and Crucifixion; and finally, the long, quiet wait till the Father brings Our Lord back from the dead in the dark of Easter night.

The week ahead is an *unmissable* week which as Catholics we should all be ready to give to the Lord in its fullness. If you’ve never chosen, before, to attend the

whole of the Triduum — Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday night — then *please* definitely think of doing so this year: the three make most sense when they are experienced as a *sequence*. Once you’ve experienced the sheer spiritual power of Holy Week in its fullness, then I do not believe one would ever go another year of one’s life without delighting to attend the whole Paschal Triduum ... One would never again want to resist giving to the Lord the great gift of one’s presence and prayer throughout Holy Week. So, let me present to you in clear fashion the week ahead at Newman House, to convince you of your attendance. (Of course, I realise that some of you may be going home, or away to other places in the Easter university vac., but the same applies — wherever you are, please find the local Church to give to Jesus your personal gift of attending *all* the Holy Week ceremonies.)

7pm Thursday evening is the **Commemoration of the Lord’s Last Supper**, in which we recall not only Christ’s great new gift of the Holy Eucharist, but also the preliminary to that, the expression of divine humility in the Washing of the apostles’ Feet — this we shall re-enact, as a reminder that the Master at

the table, the one who consecrates such a wonderful miracle as His own Body & Blood, comes as a *servant* of humanity. And then we shall process with Him to the garden of His agony, to watch through the night hours as He accepts the forthcoming sufferings out of love for the Father, and for us.

3pm Friday afternoon is the solemn and sober liturgy of the Passion, focussed on the re-telling of the Lord's sufferings and crucifixion; and the honouring of the wood of the Cross of our salvation. No Christian would want to be anywhere other than spending this day in deep prayer and thanksgiving that Jesus died on the Cross for us. Nothing is more important on Good Friday than being at the Passion liturgy. We keep it, too, as a day of fasting & abstinence from meat; and we might also devote some time to Stations of the Cross, and maybe to being in Trafalgar Sq for the Passion Play; but it is the 3pm Liturgy that is the centrepiece, and the turning point of Holy Week; a good day to pray and make it truly a 'Good & Holy Friday.'

8pm Saturday is the dawning of Easter, in the dark, as we light the new fire, and process into the dark Church armed only with the light of Christ. The great vigil will allow us to contemplate the history of the Lord's tender care for us, culminating in Jesus's Resurrection from the dead; and then,

filled with that joy, we will baptize into our community two new Christians. So: 7pm Thurs, 3pm Fri, 8pm Saturday (10.30am Sunday): give to the Lord this sacred time, to enter completely into His life-giving death and resurrection. He died for you! — it's only right to give Him your all in Holy Week.

In preparation for those most sacred of days, we also have on **Wednesday** we have a mini retreat, in the afternoon: this allows a bit of peace and prayer to reflect on some key aspects of the sacred mysteries of Holy Week. This will be from **2 to 5pm**; incl. a couple of spiritual conferences; a period of Adoration and prayer time; and a chance for Confession.

And this reminds us, that the best way to prepare yourselves for a true keeping of Holy Week, of course, is to receive the forgiveness of your sins. So, if you've not yet been to Confession this Lent, then you should make a special effort to do so this week. **The Sacrament of Reconciliation** is a treasure of mercy; the loving and forgiving heart of Jesus, who died on this Cross saying those very words, "Father, forgive them ...". Even if it's been a long time since your last Confession — *especially* if it's been a long time since your last Confession! — come this week to receive the guaranteed forgiveness that flows from this Sacrament. There is no other

way to be freed of grave sins; and it is good Catholic practice to confess also all the lesser (venial) sins you can remember. The times for Confession this week are listed in the Newsletter. The best opportunity will be after Mass tomorrow (**Mon**) **6–7pm**; or during the **Wednesday retreat afternoon (3–4pm)**, or again after Wednesday Mass (6–7pm). Please, come and live up to your Catholic faith in this regard: do not disregard the Lord's insistent call to you to be forgiven your sins. You cannot make Holy Week a more holy experience than by bathing in the mercy of Jesus, His saving, healing blood, poured out on the Cross out of love for you. *Lord, by your Cross and Resurrection, You have set us free. You are the Saviour of the World!*