

When we look upon Jesus on the cross, we see only the victory of God's love

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“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.” With these words, the people of Jerusalem acclaimed Jesus as he entered into the city. And with those same words, we begin today the holiest week of the year. The very air we breathe today and for these next several days seems charged with the intensity of grace of those saving events that happened so long ago. It's the same grace that coursed through the streets of Jerusalem. There is no other week of the year when we have the opportunity to grow as much and to drink as deeply of the grace of God as this week.

Like the gateway of the city of Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, our hearts must be wide open this week to welcome the Lord. There are many who will spend this week with a closed gate, a closed heart, and they will never be touched even slightly by its blessings. It's up to us to decide whether this gateway will truly be opened. We alone can make the choice by deciding to keep this week truly holy.

The liturgy of Palm Sunday and of the great days of Holy Week is not merely an exercise in recalling past events. It's not just an act of memory or imagination. No, through the liturgy we share, here and now, in the saving mysteries of Christ. It is no exaggeration to say that our whole vocation as Christians is to share in the paschal mystery of Christ, to join with him in his self-emptying love.

We can see that love in his obedience to the Father, an obedience he had lived all his life. It wasn't easy to obey, and we see that vividly in his agony in the garden. But Jesus does obey, and he does so out of love, love for his Father and love for us. And by our obedience, we can love too, we are there with him, united with him as he gives his life, even helping him carry his cross like a Simon of Cyrene. Obedience is not just an act of submission, but an act of compassion, an act of love.

We can see that same love in his forgiveness: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.” Even in his suffering, Jesus forgives his persecutors, as well as those who betrayed and abandoned him. Through this forgiveness, we too can share in Christ's love. It is yet another way for us to be truly one with him. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves: who has offended me, and whom do I need to forgive? And even more importantly, have we sought the forgiveness of Jesus himself? Through the sacrament of Reconciliation, we have an opportunity to hear Jesus say what he said from the cross: “Father, forgive them...” As Pope Francis tells us, our Lord never tires of forgiving us, so great is his love.

And, of course, we also experience that love in Christ's dying on the cross, his giving up of everything, to the very last breath, so we might be saved. In dying to self, we share in the dying of Jesus. And every time we die to self, even in the smallest of ways, we can be sure that the Father will bring us to new life, life that reaches into eternity. Jesus entered Jerusalem in a triumphant procession, but it all ended in the sorrowful procession to Calvary. The world might have thought this was a defeat, but it was actually a victory. When we look upon Jesus on the cross, we see only the victory of God's love.

Every Holy Week is a special, grace-filled time, but it's also good to recall that this Holy Week falls within the Jubilee of Mercy. This Holy Week gathers together the whole purpose and mystery of this year's Jubilee celebration. Jesus came to bring mercy, and he died to give us mercy. This is par excellence “the acceptable time, the day of salvation” that we heard of weeks ago on Ash Wednesday. Mercy reaches its apex in the obedience, the forgiveness, and the suffering of Christ, and he invites us to receive it in all its fullness.

Holy Week, then, is not just a past event that we observe or a memory that we recall. It is an event that we must live right now. Let us live close to Jesus and accompany him throughout this Holy Week. Let us stay close as he offers his body and blood at the Last Supper. Let us draw near to him in his agony in the garden and through his trial on Good Friday. Let us help him carry his cross through the streets of Jerusalem on his way to Calvary. And as we accompany Jesus on his journey this week, let us never forget that this story does not end at the cross. We are on our way to the empty tomb of Easter morning.

But first, we must open the gates of our hearts and allow Jesus to enter. "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest."