

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

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“Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest.” My brothers and sisters, with these words, we have reached the last part of our Lenten journey. Throughout the past five weeks, we have prayed, and fasted, and given alms. We have repented in a deeper way for our sins, and hopefully, we have received the healing and forgiveness of God in Reconciliation. And what has all of this been for? To put it simply, all through these weeks, we have tried to come closer to Jesus. We have tried to leave behind whatever obstructs us, to enter into a closer relationship with him, to receive his grace and to experience the richness of his mercy.

And now we come to the final days, the conclusion of this holy season, a week that draws us into the greatest mysteries of our faith, indeed the very meaning and mystery of our lives. During this Holy Week, Jesus is inviting us, even challenging us, to be more than just curious bystanders. He asks us to accompany him along the route of his passion. He asks us to be with him as he accepts this final act in the mission he received from his Father.

It’s easy to be a bystander, to remain somehow at a distance, uninvolved. It’s more comfortable that way; we can keep safely out of the fray, and we can avoid the challenge of this week. But our Lord asks us to not remain on the sidelines, bystanders, uninvolved. He wants us to be completely involved, because these are the most important moments in all of history, in my history and your history. These events are about us, they are for us, and it would be tragic to miss them.

In this Holy Week, and in every day, every moment of our lives, let us accompany Jesus. Walk with him and try to live close to him, especially during these holiest days of the year, as he goes up to Jerusalem to celebrate his last Passover. This day is called Palm Sunday, and also Passion Sunday. We recall that joyful entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, surrounded by waving palm branches and cries of “hosanna.” We can be there with him, we can welcome him and rejoice that Jesus has entered our city, our homes, and our own lives.

Let us try to stay close to Jesus as he celebrates the Last Supper with his disciples. He offers the bread and wine of Passover, but he actually gave his own Body and Blood to the Church, to us. In this action he anticipates the great sacrifice of his life that he will soon make, and he allows himself to be received, to be true nourishment for our souls. Every time Mass is celebrated, Jesus gives himself to us, he pours out his life for us so that we might live in and through him. He asks us to take and eat, take and drink, so that we might have eternal life. How could we stay away?

Let us be near to Jesus in his agony in the garden, when he was saddened even unto death. He knew he would be betrayed, and denied, and abandoned by his companions. But he invites us to remain close by, to support him in his agony, to be faithful when others are not. By our sins, we still betray and deny him, but here is our chance to turn the corner, to show that we’re serious, that we want to be with him forever. Let us stay with him during his trial on Good Friday, when it seems that everyone else has turned on him. Once, they cried “hosanna,” but now they are shouting, “Crucify him.” What will we say as Jesus stands before us? And let us help our Lord carry his cross through the sad streets of Jerusalem on his way to Calvary. He told his followers that they would have to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. In our daily lives, are we willing to accept the cross that comes to us, and to walk alongside Jesus, who suffered for us? Are we willing to help our neighbors bear their crosses? He tells us, “Whatever you did to these least ones, you did for me.”

At last we arrive at the Calvary, at the cross. Very few stayed with him in that dark moment, but those who did were greatly blessed. Jesus asks us to draw near and keep watch with him as he makes the perfect sacrifice to save us from our sins. If we remain near him, we can experience more powerfully than ever the grace of redemption, which we could never have won for ourselves. Only Jesus could pay the price for our sins, only he could save us, and he did. We have only to accept his gift, his redeeming love.

And finally, my brothers and sisters, 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. This story ends with the Resurrection of Easter morning! Even as we walk the via dolorosa, the way of our Lord's passion, we are hopeful, because there is resurrection for those who remain close by his side.

Think of those who accompanied Jesus along the way: Peter, James, John, Simon of Cyrene, Mary Magdalene, and the rest. Place yourself in their company and abide in the grace of this week. And let us join our Blessed Mother Mary, who also accompanied him, walking with him every step of the way, and keeping vigil at the cross. Let us ask her to teach us to have faith, and to teach us courage, so that we can follow him through our whole lives, along this way that leads to the Resurrection.