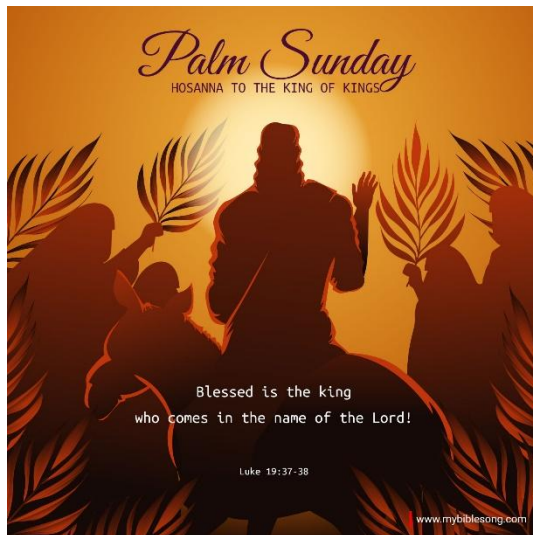


Homily – April 13th, 2025 – Passion Sunday



Have you ever read a really good book, a second time, and got something from that second reading that you missed on the first go? Or have you ever rewatched an engaging movie and drawn out of it a gem, that slipped by you the first time? I'm sure you have. These Passion readings do that for me. Without much effort, something

different speaks to me each time I engage with them. Maybe that's what God's Word is supposed to do, since it is the "living Word of God."

Lutheran minister Nadia Bolz-Weber says that the preacher is so obviously preaching to himself/herself and just allow others to overhear it. Here is what is rattling around in my head, if you would like to overhear it. From that second reading it says, "***Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited*** (something to be clung to), ***but emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave, being born in human likeness***" (Phil. 2:6).

Having become human, Jesus remained human. He never took special privilege to himself, even though he was God's equal. That's the kicker for me. Not only did he *become* human, but he *remained* human through to his dying breath.

Back on the first Sunday of Lent, you might remember the gospel story of how Jesus was tempted in the desert. That story ended this way: ***“When the devil had finished every test, he departed from Jesus until an opportune time”*** (Lk. 4:13). The opportune time presented itself, in today’s Passion reading, at the Crucifixion when Jesus would be physically and mentally weak and vulnerable.

The three temptations in the desert, as you recall, were attempts by the devil to convince Jesus to forsake his humanness and use his divine power, that is, if he really was who he said he was—God’s Son. After all, if you are God’s Son, you should turn stones into bread and eat. And if you are God’s Son, you should claim for yourself the powers of the kingdoms of the world. And if you are God’s Son, you should be free of harm, so go ahead and throw yourself off the top of the Temple. God’s angels will rescue you. Jesus sees all of these as temptations. They are temptations to rid himself, at least just for a moment, of what it means to be human and to cling to his divinity as the Son of God. But our salvation comes from the fact that he won’t do it. Why?

Because he was thinking of every human being who came before him and every human being who would come after him, including you and me. Every one of us here has been hungry and couldn’t just snap our fingers at stones and *voilà* we were satisfied. Having become human, Jesus remained human. He remained in solidarity with every human being who has ever hungered for anything, not just for food.

Secondly, every one of us here has experienced powerlessness and couldn't do anything about it. Maybe we weren't grabbing for the power of the nations of the world, but a little bit of power over sickness, poverty, and depression would not be a bad thing from time to time, could it?. Jesus took no privilege for himself in the world of power, because he wanted to be in solidarity with you. He wanted to be tight with you every time you felt powerless to change something for the better but weren't able to do it.

Consider the third temptation. Every one of us, while not taking foolish risks like jumping off a temple, has experienced danger, risk, and pain. We've all landed hard on the stones of life without an angel to break our fall. Jesus never promised a life without pain, but he did say, ***"My yoke is easy, my burden is light."*** He promised to walk with us, yoking himself to our pain, and doing all of the heavy lifting. Jesus never took privilege to himself so as to avoid pain, because he knew we also would not have the privilege to simply wish pain away in our lives.

Those three temptations of the devil awaited another opportune time. Ah, the perfect time, while Jesus is vulnerable and dying on the Cross. Here they come again in a slightly difference form. Firstly, the people scoffed at Jesus saying, ***"He saved others, let him save himself."*** The soldiers mocked Jesus with, ***"If you're the King of the Jews, save yourself!"*** And, thirdly, one of the thieves crucified next to Jesus said, ***"Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"*** They all want Jesus to take privilege for himself, and, once again, Jesus refuses. Jesus will not break his solidarity with us.

Jesus did not see equality with God as something to be clung to but emptied himself. Clinging and equality with God are contradictions. It is not just his powers that Jesus does not grasp at but his very life. Jesus has already told us, long before he enters into his Passion, that nobody takes his life from him but that he freely lays it down (Jn. 10:18). The reason nobody can take it from him is that he never held onto it in the first place. They cannot take from Jesus what he is not clutching. Spiritual writer John Shea writes, ***“This radical detachment of Jesus makes him dangerous, for as every ruler knows, the person with nothing to lose is free to speak the truth...Jesus gives away his power and hands himself over to death not in spite of the fact that he is the Son of God but because of it.”***

Jesus has nothing to lose; he has already given it all away to us and for us. He's absolutely free. He has laid down his life for us. All he wants to know is: Do you want it?

~Fr. Phil