

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion – March 24, 2024 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of Saint Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 7:15am Sunday Mass – 550 words

As we embark upon another Holy Week, it is important for us to remember that the liturgies of this time are meant to help us enter in more fully into the great mystery of Christ that we celebrate. The second reading for the Palm Sunday Mass – Saint Paul's Christological hymn from his letter to the Philippians – sums up this entire mystery for us. It starts on a high note: Christ Jesus is God, but willed to come down to our level. Thus we see him entering into the royal city of Jerusalem to the acclaim of the people – when soon enough, he will be rejected by those same crowds.

The hymn then highlights Christ's obedience, which we heard about in the gospel as he prayed at Gethsemane, and which will shine forth through each of the upcoming days, as he resolutely seeks to fulfill his Father's purpose. Thus, we will recall this moment again as we inaugurate the Sacred Triduum on Holy Thursday, hearing how Judas Iscariot had already given himself over to evil intent regarding his Lord. And as the washing of the feet takes place and the hymn to charity is sung, we will have the opportunity to reflect upon how God chose us out of love, just like he did for Judas.

On Good Friday, Christ's obedience will culminate in his death on the cross – which we will have the chance to venerate in that most awe-filled moment of the Church's year. We are fortunate to have a life-like and life-sized crucifix just for the Friday veneration. And just as there are extra times for the sacrament of confession this week, so there will be three hours of confession offered before the Good Friday ceremonies, so that all who have not already done so may have the opportunity to ready themselves spiritually for these high holy days – another manifestation of Christ's love.

But then the hymn of Saint Paul speaks about the exaltation of Jesus, including that every knee “in heaven and on earth and under the earth” shall bend in reverence at the mere mention of his name. This exaltation in fact begins on Holy Saturday, with Christ's spiritual descent into Hell, where he begins to manifest himself as Lord of all and victor over all evil and death. And it will continue with the Easter Vigil, when the “alleluia” of his bodily resurrection is sung forth and we begin the 50-day celebration that heralds the total redemption of man and the great hope to which we, too, are called.

Thus Saint Paul's hymn and this week begin with the high note of “Hosanna” – and both the hymn and the week resolve with the high note of “Alleluia”. Along the way, it all descends into the very valley of the shadow of death. I warmly invite you to find the time to participate in all these moments to the extent that you can, for they are the memorials of our salvation. If you have not yet been to confession – please, find the time this week to take care of that. If this Lent has not been so great – embrace this final stretch, and rise again with our Lord all the same. Let us all keep these high holy days of our religion with devotion and praise.