

Palm Sunday 2020 “*Eli Eli lema sabachthani*”

Fr. Frank Schuster

And so it begins. My friends, we have entered into Holy Week. The Passion preaches for itself. We have entered into the drama of our salvation.

There is so much here to reflect on, especially as we celebrate our first Holy Week without a congregation physically present in the church. With everything going on, Jesus’ last words on the cross in Matthew’s gospel seem to hit very close to the mark, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani*”. My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? These last words from Jesus on the cross are from psalm 22. You may wish to pick up a bible this week and prayerfully read it, because in this psalm contains Jesus’ understanding of why his death on the cross was salvific for the human race. The last part of psalm 22 is quite revealing. Towards the end the psalmist says, “All the ends of the earth will worship and turn to the Lord...All who sleep in the earth will bow low before God; all who have gone down in the dust will kneel in homage.”

This piece is revealing because, on the cross, Jesus entered into the very heart of what it feels like to be Godforsaken, what it feels like to succumb to sin and death itself, so to truly become for us the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Let’s hear the psalmist again, “All who sleep in the earth will bow low before God; all who have gone down in the dust will kneel in homage”. That is God’s agenda.

My friends, Jesus’ last words on the cross also invite us to truthfully acknowledge the areas of our lives that just simply feels Godforsaken right now, that simply feels broken. When were those times when we just felt like we betrayed Jesus maybe for a handful of silver, whatever that metaphor means? When were the times when we felt spiritually asleep, unaware at how much we took the Lord for granted until he was taken away from us? When were the times that we exchanged charity for violence toward those around us, in our thoughts perhaps, in our words or even actions? For me, the image of a disciple cutting off someone’s ear in our Gospel reading is so provocative because when we resort to violent thoughts, words and deeds the first thing that goes is the ability to hear, to listen.

You see, now more than ever we recognize that there is an inherent dysfunction at the core of our being, a place where we feel Godforsaken. Jesus’ last words on the cross are evidence that Jesus truly understands how we feel. If we ever feel like we are falling from the Father to hell itself, Jesus now stands in between. What this means is, hell itself cannot stand in the way of God’s love for you. That is what the cross says. The cross is God yelling out, I love you. I will go to hell and back for you. And, I will never abandon you.

My friends, I invite us to make Holy Week a retreat experience for you and your family. And this year, it will be a very unique retreat experience because you will need to join us from home. Please join us online for the Holy Triduum this year, our parish website will show you how, beginning with a live stream of Holy Thursday at 5 PM with the video being available on our website around 7 PM. Good Friday this year will be live-streamed at 3 PM and will be uploaded on our website around 5 PM Friday evening. Our Easter Vigil will be live-streamed at 8:30 PM and will be uploaded to our website around 10:30 PM. And Easter Sunday will be live-streamed at 9 AM and hopefully uploaded to the website by around 11 AM. Meanwhile, the church will be open for “private prayer” for those who are healthy and not in the “at risk” population. Those hours will be 7 PM-9 PM on Holy Thursday, between 4 PM and 8 PM on Good Friday and 10 AM to 2 PM on Easter Day. And so, however we are able, we are challenged to stay awake with the Lord this Holy Week and to experience in our hearts the love of God, the sacred story, and the divine conspiracy that heralds the salvation of our world.