

March 20, 2016

From Father Jim...



Today, Holy Week begins. Mass starts with the blessing of palm branches, proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and a procession by the assembly into church. For the Liturgy of the Word, the gospel selection is the Passion from Luke's Gospel. Holy week begins on Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion and we are all invited to enter into and participate in the Passion of Christ as it unfolds throughout all of Holy Week in the liturgies and rituals that we celebrate. This is especially true with the Three days that we call the Triduum – Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil.

This is the greatest week of prayer for the Church. Our liturgy throughout the year moves us to this week and climaxes in the three days of the Triduum and the celebration of Easter. "If we die with the Lord then we will truly rise with Him." There is no greater love than this than to lay down one's life for one's friends." This is what we believe, pray and live in this holiest of weeks.

As the church gathers all over the world to celebrate the liturgies of Holy Week as they have been given to us throughout the ages to be prayed, we grow together as the church, the Body of Christ, brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is especially evident because this is an important time to initiate new members and to renew our baptismal promises. This holiest of weeks and the way that the Church of God is invited to pray sees itself as one with God, through Jesus and in their Spirit and one with each other in Christ.

As we enter into the prayer of Holy Week, can we do so with open hearts and with a genuine desire to let this greatest week of prayer in the church really change us? If the prayer of this week is about the continual formation of the whole church in the love and image of Christ then it, too, provides great formation for us, as St. Leo, to be formed into the Body of Christ, especially with our many and wonderful diversities. It is important for all of us to come together and pray this week of prayer. Each of the Triduum liturgies will try to engage the full participation of one assembly with different cultures.

Washing each other's feet, processing to adore the cross, renewing our baptismal promises together, and communing on the Lord's body and blood; people of every race, language and way of life being formed in the very image of Christ and receiving the promise and hope of eternal glory together is the formation that we need to be the church universal and the church of God at St. Leo. May God bless our every effort to enter with him into his passion this week.

William Arthur Ward, American author, teacher and pastor, 1921-1994, wrote: Fast from judging others; Feast on Christ dwelling in them. Fast from emphasis on differences; Feast on the unity of life. Fast from apparent darkness; Feast on the reality of light. Fast from thoughts of illness; Feast on the healing power of God. Fast from words that pollute; Feast on phrases that purify. Fast from discontent; Feast on patience. Fast from anger; Feast on patience. Fast from pessimism; Feast on optimism. Fast from worry; Feast on Divine order. Fast from complaining; Feast on appreciation. Fast from negatives; Feast on affirmatives. Fast from unrelenting pressures; Feast on unceasing prayer. Fast from hostility; Feast on nonresistance. Fast from bitterness; Feast on forgiveness. Fast from self-concern; Feast on compassion for others. Fast from personal anxiety; Feast on eternal truth. Fast from discouragements; Feast on hope. Fast from facts that depress; Feast on verities that uplift. Fast from lethargy; Feast on enthusiasm. Fast from thoughts that weaken; Feast on promises that inspire. Fast from shadows of sorrow; Feast on the sunlight of serenity. Fast from idle gossip; Feast on purposeful silence. Fast from problems that overwhelm; Feast on prayer that strengthens.

May our fasting lead us to the great love of Holy Week and the incredible glory of Easter!

A Reflection on the Palm Branch: Hold the palm branch that you received at the liturgy this weekend and notice how supple it is. What shape will you give it? Will you braid it into a cross? Where will you put it? When you look at it, what comes to mind? Do you enter into prayer? Do you praise God for the gift of salvation and sing quietly to yourself a Hosanna for how much God loves you?

Throughout the year, notice how brittle the palm is becoming. Just to look at it could cause it to break in half and one must be extra careful when touching it so as not to have it crumble apart. Will you still enter into prayer? Will you be thankful to the Lord because there is truly "no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends?" How is this love forming you and shaping you more into a child of God's kingdom? Can you see how dying leads to resurrection? Where is the old becoming new in you? Again, it is