

Homily for Palm Sunday

April 13-14, 2019

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:6-11; Luke 22:14-23:56

Preacher: Deni Mack

It is hard to look at Jesus suffering. We gasp in horror. Or worse—we are numb. Year after year we see that adulation on Palm Sunday. And then we walk with Jesus through Holy Week.

The longer I live the more I see Holy Week is every week and I cannot get through the Lord's Prayer without getting stuck on, "Give us this day our daily Bread." I know Jesus is suffering with every child in Syria and Yemen who have known no other life but war. Their mothers, too, need bread or their babies will starve. Where do you see Jesus suffering today? In the parents whose children have been ripped away and the children, so innocent, so lost and frightened?

A man troubled by his brother's illness asks: "why doesn't God intervene? I want a God who stops suffering, a God who will not let his son die, who will not let my brother suffer."

Isn't that who we all want—a God who heals Brian, Courtney and Melissa so they never want a drug again? I too want God to get Joe walking again, to comfort Peg, so alone since Tom's death; I want God to give Coco, Kristin, Sarah, Laura, Austin, Megan, Christopher, Steven, Zoe and Colleen and their parents and grandparents the healing balm of hope. I want God to heal little Jack and Hazel and their families, our planet and our priorities.

And we trust and pray and hope some of them may see some healing as God climbs the ash heaps of our suffering with us.

Every one of us is carrying a cross. We put one foot in front of the other...carrying our crosses, we listen for the still small voice of the one who died on Calvary.

Carrying our crosses, we let God transform our pain or it casts a pall, a web of grief.

Carrying our crosses, we make God's presence known and felt. We will carry Christ's compassion where it is needed and help others do the same. We'll tell the stories of those who feed others despite being hungry themselves.

How do we find the courage to serve in His name, for Him, with Him?

Remember the repentant thief? In all his weakness and brokenness, in penitence and faith, he prayed.

Jesus, in all his pain and agony listened to him. What did Jesus say? "Today you will be with me in paradise." And, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." I have found those words helpful in years of suffering. We will suffer when our loved ones suffer...

What we do with our suffering makes all the difference. We could let it consume us, make us mean, uncaring, unfeeling, unsympathetic. Or we can beg God to not let our lack of peace leak onto others, deadening their peace. We beg God to transform our suffering so we don't lay it on others. God, into your hands we commend our spirit.

Some ask in tears, Where is God? Some claim God is impotent in war, rape, abuse and neglect, with the families of those killed in the mosques in Christchurch and Tree of Life Temple in Pittsburgh and the children weeping in cages who do not know where their parents are.

I say there God is *with* them—in Sr. Norma Pimentel working in McAllen, TX; and our local heroines, Sisters Donna, Janet and Phyllis who travelled to El Paso to volunteer their unabashed love, their Spanish and nursing and social work skills; and Ellen, who volunteered her legal skills; and Penny who has worked with migrants for many years, and is eager to work with refugees at the border this May.

And we know beyond knowing—God is climbing the ash heaps of our suffering with all of them and with us, transforming those ash heaps *with* us.

In a Nazi death camp, Eli Wiesel heard an ungodly scream, “Where is God?” and a man pointed his skeletal finger at a boy who’d been hung in the prison yard. He said, “There he is.”

There God is, *in* whoever is suffering. There God is. In Christ, the humiliated and suffering God keeps on loving, keeps on forgiving, keeps on showing us the ultimate meaning of human life. Love is stronger than evil, stronger than suffering, love is stronger than death.