

Fr. Michael's Reflection: Palm/Passion Sunday -

The Church celebrates this sixth Sunday of Lent as both Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. This is the point in the Liturgical year when the Church stops us so that we can remember and relive the events which brought about our redemption and salvation. What we commemorate and relive during this week is not just Jesus' dying and rising, but our own dying to sin and selfishness and rising in Jesus, which will result in our healing, reconciliation, and redemption. Attentive participation in the Holy Week liturgy will deepen our relationship with God, increase our Faith, and strengthen our lives as disciples of Jesus. Today's liturgy combines contrasting moments, one of glory, the other of suffering: the royal welcome of Jesus entering Jerusalem, and the rigged trial, culminating in the crucifixion, death, and burial of the Christ.

Today's first reading, the third of Isaiah's four *Servant Songs*, like the other three, foreshadows Jesus' own life and mission. The Refrain for today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 22), "***My God, My God, why have You abandoned Me?***" plunges us into the heart of Christ's Passion. The Second Reading, taken from Paul's letter to the Philippians, is an ancient Christian hymn representing a very early Christian understanding of who Jesus IS, and how his mission saves us from sin and death. The first part of today's Gospel describes the royal reception Jesus received from his admirers, who paraded with him for a distance of the two miles between the Mount of Olives and the city of Jerusalem. In the second part of today's Gospel, we listen to/participate in a reading of the Passion of Christ according to Matthew. We are challenged to examine our own lives in the light of some of the characters in the Passion story – like Peter who denied Jesus, Judas who betrayed Jesus, Herod who ridiculed Jesus, Pilate who acted against his conscience as he condemned Jesus to death on the cross, and the leaders of the people who thought to preserve their position by getting rid of Jesus.

As we begin this Holy Week let us do so with the words St. Thomas spoke in last weekend's gospel, "Let us go and die with him." Indeed, let us go and die with Jesus as we enter with him in his passion and death, so that we may rise with him in the glory of his risen life.