



**Most Rev. Robert D. Gruss
Bishop of Rapid City**

PALM SUNDAY HOMILY

Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help

April 1, 2012

Palm Sunday is not about ancient history, something that happened 2000 years ago. What we celebrate today is not just something that is symbolic of what happened long ago. It is about the here and now. Jesus refused to save the world by what we recognize as power. He still does not use divine force to wipe out disease, poverty, crime, oppression, injustice or error. Jesus still tries to convert it rather than control it. He still tries to convert us rather than control us. He still chooses to love us rather than punish. He still chooses meekness over might, poverty over plenty, service over supremacy and suffering over strong-armed tactics. These saving actions of Jesus are part of the here and now. They are all part of this Holy Week.

The readings of today and the celebration of today set the stage for our reflection this week. Today this week begins with adoration and homage, people spreading their cloaks and branches on the road, welcoming their king with shouts of “Hosanna” [a word which originally meant “save us”] and later became a shout of praise. Jesus is being proclaimed their king outside the city gates.

But the week will move to murder and mourning, and people shouting “Crucify him.” Jesus enters the city alone. Where have all those people gone? The crowds will give way to a mob.

But we know it will also end with greatness and glory. So this week must be a celebration of Jesus’ love. This is not a week for sorrow, but for gratitude, joy, and hope. That through this saving act of Jesus, that through Jesus, who emptied Himself and became a slave for us, you and I now have access to the Father.

Six weeks ago when we begin this season of grace on Ash Wednesday, I begin with a line that we will hear on Good Friday, [one very important to Mother Teresa] as Jesus was hanging on the cross: “*I thirst.*” I said that this line sets the stage for all we do during this Lenten season. This “thirst” was not a thirst for water, but a thirst for love, for our love, for our sacrifice, for our hearts.

As we enter into this week, Christ’s “*thirst*” for us is totally consummated in this drama of our salvation. We are given great insight into what this thirst really is. It gives us great insight into how our lives are to be lived and what has been done for us.

Jesus is revealed to us through St. Mark as Son, Savior and King, only on the cross. It is the cross which is His altar. For Mark, Jesus is the Servant-King, the Defeated-Victor, the one who gives life by facing and embracing death. His passion redeems us; His passion brought an end to our separation from God. Mark says, “*The veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom.*”

There is no longer any separation between God and His people. In His passion, Jesus moves forward to embrace His death as the most complete sign of love possible.

If we take the time to pray with and reflect upon this Passion story this week, we will find a bit of us in all the characters. We will find ourselves in the woman with the alabaster jar wanting to anoint the feet of Jesus; we will find ourselves as Simon of Cyrene desiring to help carry the cross of others. We will also find ourselves like Pilate, afraid to speak the truth and do what is right and just. We will also find ourselves like Simon Peter and some of the other apostles leaving Jesus to suffer alone, afraid of getting involved. We will see ourselves like the Jewish leadership, fearful of being stripped of power and security.

But one thing for certain, we will also find ourselves loved in a tremendous way. We will hear the words of Jesus, *“Forgive them. For they do not know what they do.”* We will experience His love for us through this self giving act. In His humility, Jesus counted everyone better than Himself in the sense that they were worth dying for.

It is to this that we live this week, not in sorrow, but in gratitude, joy, and hope, that you and I are worth dying for, and that God has removed the veil that keeps us from Him.

The graces of Easter will come to those who slow down this week, spend more time in prayer and reflection, and enter into the restlessness of our own hearts.

To be with Jesus this week in the drama of His own life, death, and resurrection, experiencing His own thirst, is not to be disinterested and at a distance, but to be walking with him, each day and all the way.

As we begin this entry into Holy Week, as St. Andrew of Crete shares with us in this morning’s Office of Readings in the Liturgy of the Hours, *“So let us spread before his feet, not garments or soul-less olive branches, which delight the eye for a few hours and then wither, but ourselves, clothed in his grace, or rather completely clothed in him. Let our souls take the place of the welcoming branches as we join in the children’s holy song: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”*