



Homily - Palm Sunday 2015

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St Mary's Cathedral
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Recently Pope Francis, in a homily at his morning Mass in the Vatican, invited those at the Mass to make room in their lives for God's love so that He could change them.

Today, as we celebrate Palm Sunday and enter into the holiest week of the year, I would like to borrow the Pope's words and issue the same invitation to all of you here in the Cathedral, including, of course, myself: *"Make room in your lives for God's love so he can change you"*.

From today onwards, and over the course of this coming week, the Church will put before us the story of the last week of Jesus' own life. We will hear about people who do, in fact, change because they have opened themselves to God's love. We will hear, for example, about Martha whose love for the Lord so overwhelmed her that she anointed His feet with precious oil and dried His feet with her hair. We will hear about the disciples who, in spite of their growing fear, did their best to stay close to Jesus, even if their courage failed most of them at the last minute. We will hear about John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, who did stay faithful and stood with Mary at the foot of the cross. We will hear about Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, both Jewish leaders, who found the courage to defend Him and to bury His broken body after His death. All these people, and many others, not least among them Mary, the Lord's mother, had made room in their lives for God's love and that love changed them - it transformed them into people of extraordinary courage, compassion and fidelity.

We will also hear of people who did not make room in their lives for God's love. They remained locked in their narrow worlds and their blindness. We will hear of some of the Jewish leaders whom Jesus Himself had identified as people whose hearts were hard and cold. They could not tolerate the openness, gentleness and compassion of Jesus. In some strange way, hard for us to understand, they saw Him as a threat. We will hear about Judas, one of those closest to Jesus, who, in spite of that closeness, remained closed to Jesus' love. We will hear about Peter, who denied that he even knew Jesus but who, in the end, was forgiven because his betrayal was the result of fear rather than because he had blocked the Lord from his life. And we will hear of those who, in the face of the resurrection of Jesus, still tried to destroy Him by making up a story that His disciples had stolen His dead body.

As I reflect on these two groups of people - those who had made room for God's love in their lives and those who did not - two things strike me.

The first is that the change which God's love brings about in our lives is one that actually brings us alive, makes us more genuinely human, and enables us to be the people God created us to be. If our faith, and the practice of our religion, is not bringing us deep joy and



a new freedom to live our lives with enthusiasm and gratitude, we may need to ask ourselves if we have really yet understood the gift of faith the Lord has given us.

The second is that a failure to make room in our lives for God's love can have terrible and destructive effects, not only for us but for others as well, including and especially those closest to us. The failure of Judas, and of some of the Jewish leaders, led to the torture and execution of Jesus. Our own failures to embrace God's love may not have such drastic effects, but we may still be, and even become more rather than less, causes of suffering, of distress and even of despair, in the lives of others. We see this all around us. Do we have the courage and the humility to recognise that it might also be a part of our own story?

Holy Week, which begins today, is a time when the Church provides us with extraordinary opportunities to make room in our lives for God's love. Through the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation, and through the beautiful and inspiring liturgies of the Chrism Mass on Tuesday night, the commemoration of the Last Supper on Holy Thursday evening, the Stations of the Cross and the afternoon service on Good Friday, the Easter Vigil on Saturday night and the Mass on Easter Sunday, we will, if we let ourselves, be plunged into the story of God's extraordinary love for us.

It will be like diving into a pool and finding ourselves surrounded above and below by the water of life. All we have to do is let it happen. All we have to do is make room for it in our lives this week. Jesus is standing at the door of our hearts, knocking. If we open the door and invite Him in, He will come and sit down with us, share His life with us, and welcome us as His disciples and friends.

So let us accept the invitation of Pope Francis: *make room in your lives for God's love and He will change you.*