



Palm Sunday 2018

HOMILY

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
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One of the questions which often plays on the minds of many good people, including us no doubt, is this: what must I do to live a truly good life? How can I ensure that all the good that lies within me rises to the surface and brings deep joy not only to me but to all those people who in one way or another are a part of my life?

Behind this question of course is that deep realization that as a human being I am in fact capable of great things: of extraordinary generosity, of selfless and self-sacrificing love, of great compassion and of large-hearted forgiveness.

At the same time most of us are acutely aware of the reality that we do not always, or perhaps even very often, realise this potential for greatness. As Saint Paul puts it in one of his letters, *we do not understand our own actions. For we do not do what we want, but we do the very things we hate* (cf Rom 7:14).

This profound contradiction which lies within each one of us is one that can only find its complete resolution in Jesus Christ. What Saint Paul says about each of us he could never say about Christ, for Christ always did what he, or rather what his heavenly Father, wanted, and never did the things he hated, or rather knew that his heavenly Father hated. This is exactly what the Letter to the Hebrews means when it says that Jesus was "like us in all things except sin".

The Church's tradition explains this a little more when in the documents of Vatican II we read that *"Jesus fully reveals human beings to themselves and brings to light their most high calling"*. We might put it more simply by saying that if we want to really understand what it means to live our lives as God intends us to live them, then we must look to Jesus, enter into a deeper relationship of trust and love with him, and begin to live the life that his presence within us makes possible.

While this is always true it takes on a particular significance in Holy Week which of course begins today. Perhaps more than at any other time of the year the process of journeying with Jesus as he approaches his passion and death, and the effort to try to enter into his mind and heart as he lives these last days of his life, really can help us to understand what it means to live life as God intended that it should be lived.

Today then, we begin by accompanying Jesus as he enters into Jerusalem, receiving the enthusiastic welcome of the crowds. But as we know, and as Jesus must also have known, many



of these same people will turn against Jesus: that his entry into Jerusalem is in fact his entry into death. And yet, he does not turn back.

Later this week we will watch as Jesus sits at the table and shares a last meal with his disciples, giving them the bread and wine which are transformed into his body and blood, broken and spilt for them and for us. Even though, as we know, Jesus is very aware of what awaits him, on this night his thoughts are not with himself, but with his disciples who are also his friends.

From Thursday night of this week onwards, we will then in a sense walk with Jesus as he travels that terrible journey from the room of the Last Supper to the Garden of Gethsemane and eventually, in much pain and suffering, to the hill of Calvary where what happened at the table in symbol will happen in reality: his body will be broken on the cross and his blood will be poured out in death. He will give everything he is and everything he has for love of us and all God's children.

And so, as we watch Jesus in these final days of his life, we see a man who is determined to give everything, to hold nothing back, to suffer humiliation, and hatred, and ridicule and, finally, to die, because of love. There are many explanations for Jesus' death – the jealousy and fear of some of the Jewish leaders, the betrayal of Judas, the cruelty and blood-lust of the Roman army, the cowardice of Pontius Pilate, and ultimately of course our sins – but in the end there is only one explanation. Jesus gave his life for us because he loved us – and still loves us.

As we travel with Jesus in this Holy Week and see there nothing but love, we know that we are seeing before us what we are all called to be; women and men of generous self-giving, self-forgetfulness, absolute fidelity, and unbreakable love. To live this way will cost a great deal, and demand more of us than we ever thought ourselves capable of giving. We need not give up in despair however for what we cannot do ourselves we can hope to do in and through our communion with the Lord.

At Mass this morning, then, let us commit ourselves to a journey which is not just a passive following of Jesus as this week unfolds but rather an active search for communion with him. His story will then become our story and the joy of Easter which lies ahead will be ours because it is his, and we will share it together.