

Palm Sunday April 5 2020

Most of you all know that I come from Kentucky, and if you didn't know it I certainly gave it away with that "you all," and recently I heard from my brother Wayne that the Governor of Kentucky, Andy Brashear, holds a press conference every day at 5 o'clock to give an update on the preparations throughout the state against the Coronavirus. The most interesting thing, though, is that he starts each briefing by saying, "We will get through this; we will get through this together." And then he has everyone present repeat it along with him. That struck me as a really good thing to do, so I invite you all to join along with me, and let's all say, "We will get through this; we will get through this together." And let's repeat it once more for good measure, "We will get through this; we will get through this together."

Prayer: Most merciful God, as we come into Holy Week this year, may your Word bear us up in the darkest times with the light of your hope and love. This we ask in the Name of Jesus our Savior and friend. Amen.

As we hear the Passion Gospel this year, I hear it in a much different light. For years I have wondered how the crowd and the people could turn on Jesus so quickly: as we celebrate today, Jesus enters Jerusalem to shouts of joy and great acclamation. This procession, as he enters, is a triumph, modeled almost on the "Triumph" of an Emperor, coming back to Rome to be greeted by the Senate, the aristocracy and the people, Jesus is acclaimed by the people, seen as the coming Messiah, the anointed one, the one to bring deliverance, indeed, Psalm 118, which we referenced at the beginning of this service, is on the lips of the people, "Blessed is the one who comes in the Name of the Lord." But just a few short days later, Jesus is arrested as a seditious terrorist, the crowd turns their back on Jesus, but even worse, they join right in with the mockery, taunting and vilification. Jesus is past on, beaten and finally taken to the place of his humiliating execution. I've always

wondered, how could things change so quickly? How can Jesus move so rapidly from one reality to another. Now, today, now in the age of the Coronavirus pandemic, a time in which things seem to change constantly, change more quickly than anyone can keep up with, now I better, understand what happens to Jesus in these few short days. Certainly, this pace of change makes your head spin, and it is this topsy-turvey, breakneck speed that can grab our attention, but that really just obscures what is going on: Jesus is headed in the Way of the Cross. And for us, today, with the latest news coming from New York City, Long Island, Detroit, New Orleans, and still going on in Italy, France, the United Kingdom and all across the world, touching almost every nation and region, death is in the air: as Jesus moves down the Way of the Cross this year during our Holy Week in this pandemic year of 2020, a Way of the Cross we know leads to his death, death now seems inescapable to us, stalking our land and breathing down our necks behind us.

In reflecting on this, I remembered a Gospel tune the St. Mary's Church choir in Harlem would sing. I was going to play a version of it, but the technology demons kept it from working, so I'm afraid I have to go old school to let you hear it, and my greatest apologies: "Must Jesus bear the cross alone, and all the world go free, No, there's a cross for everyone, and there's a cross for me." Yes, as Jesus bears the cross this Holy Week, I feel that certainly we all have a cross as we face this coronavirus, but actually, as we face all the illnesses, injustices, inequalities and natural disasters of our world. The world can be a dangerous and difficult place. But just as we see Jesus walk the Way of the cross this week in trust and faith, knowing that deep pain of abandonment by his friends, feeling the depth of hurt in the mockery of the soldiers and the ridicule of the religious leaders, and finally the agony of an excruciating death, yes knowing all this yet still keeping true to his mission and to God's love. And that reminds me of the second verse of the hymn St. Mary's choir would sing, "Father, I stretch my hands to thee, no other

help I know, if thou withdraw thyself from me, O wither shall I go?" That's where we are now, stretching out our hands, reaching out in prayer, reaching out by staying in touch, reaching out with an encouraging word or an act of kindness that mean so much against the backdrop of a pandemic. Yes, we reach out to God and to each other knowing fully that without our faith, without our sisters and brothers in Christ, we haven't got a prayer, literally and figuratively! That's maybe the hardest thing about this pandemic, that yes we are all in it together, and we will get through it together, but we cannot be together, we cannot be there to shake a hand, to put a comforting hand on a shoulder or to give a supportive hug. Our physical distancing, though, that's how we show love now, how we care for each other. Perhaps that physical distancing, the love which we practice now that is so hard by placing distance and barriers between ourselves. Yet maybe for us in the midst of this pandemic in Holy Week, perhaps for us Jesus on the cross is the symbol of our times: physically and socially isolated on the cross, yet there, there supremely, Jesus shows us the depth of sacrificial love, a self giving love to save the world by standing fast in the face of evil, injustice and death itself. Like the ambulance drivers, EMTs and other first responders, like the emergency room personnel, nurses, medical techs, doctors and respiratory therapists, and indeed, even like the grocery workers and or sanitation workers, who continue to keep food and essential services going in the midst of this raging storm, this is a kind of self-sacrificial love we see in our day on the Way of the cross. May God bless them all and grant them peace and protection in their vital work to save lives. But for all of us, for all of us this Holy Week, as we know we will face an unrelenting death toll in the coming days, as we know the difficulty in facing the uncertainties, we still walk the Way of the cross with Jesus, we still walk the way of the cross with the same trust and faith that Jesus' love inspires in our lives: We walk this way with Jesus, because it brings us to the foot of the cross, brings us to the place where even in the midst of

death, we see the face of God's love, we see the depth of God's love for you and for me. As Governor Brashear says, "we will get through this, we will get through this together" and in the years to come as we remember our grief and sorrow, our terror and fear, we will remember what it was like to be there. But now, as we walk the Way of the cross, as we walk with Jesus and kneel at the foot of the cross this week, now we ask...."Were you there, when they crucified my Lord?" Amen.