

## FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

Today we celebrate Passion Sunday. Every year, we read the Passion Narrative so that we may enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ's merciful love for us. In this article, I will simply highlight a few areas for reflection on God's love for us shown in the Passion according to St. Luke.

After the Last Supper, Jesus says to Simon Peter, "**Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers**" (Lk 22:31-32). Jesus foresees that His disciples will fail and fall, and that they will be tempted to despair. He tells them this so that they may be strengthened. He specifically calls out Simon, for His sin will be worse. Jesus Himself is praying for him that he will be able to rise again and strengthen the other disciples. In our hour of need, in the worst trials of temptation, Jesus is praying for each of us, too. He has a way out, a way through the temptation... if we humbly avail ourselves of His Grace.

Luke's account of the Agony in the Garden is the only one to recount that an angel from heaven is sent to Jesus to strengthen Him and that Jesus is in such agony that He sweats blood (Lk 22:43-44). There is such beauty in this. Jesus shows how deeply He enters into our humanity – "He went through it first." Jesus shows us that He needs to be strengthened in His humanity. He shows that He is not immune to terror from impending doom. It is, rather, through *this agony* that He shows us it can be conquered. God sends us angels to strengthen us in our journey to Him. He does not leave us orphan. Even in the most desperate of situations, He is with us and will walk with us. Following Christ doesn't mean the impending doom will be lifted (Jesus still went to the Cross), but that we will be given the courage we need to face that doom with strength and love.

Simon eventually does deny Jesus three times. In Luke's Gospel alone, does it mention that when the cock crows, Jesus "**turned and looked at Peter**" (Lk 22:61), which causes Him to go out and weep bitterly. The look of Jesus would not have been one of recrimination: Jesus always looks with love on His children. When we have failed – and we know that that failure, that sin, has hurt someone we love, and hurt him deeply – we often try to cover it up so we don't have to be reminded of it. But when that failure is met with merciful love! Oh, how our hearts are broken by our sinfulness! Jesus still loves, and I believe that look of love to Peter is what saved Him from falling into the same despair that led Judas to suicide. In our sinfulness, may we have the courage to look into the loving eyes of Jesus, and receive His mercy!

St. Luke tells us of how Pontius Pilate is eager not to have to make judgment on Jesus, and so sends him to Herod (Lk 23:6-11). Herod has been longing to see Jesus, but not because he wants to hear the Words of Life; Herod wants entertainment. He thinks Jesus would be a good magician; He could come in and work a sign, a miracle before Herod, and he would be "wowed". But our God is not a show pony; He doesn't act for us. God doesn't work miracles to entertain. His signs and miracles are done for one reason and one reason only – to draw us back to His embrace, so that we can be with Him forever. This is the sole goal of everything God does for us: our eternal life with Him. When Herod doesn't get the entertainment he is seeking, he lets Jesus be mocked and contemptuously treated; in this he finds a different form of entertainment. When we don't get what we want from God, when He doesn't jump through our hoops, do we separate ourselves from God, upset that "my will" is not being done (as opposed to "thy will be done")? Or do we, like Jesus, say, "Not my will, but yours be done"?

One final reflection from St. Luke's Passion: the last words of Jesus. Only in Luke is it recorded that Jesus, from the Cross, cries out, "**Father, forgive them, they know not what they do**" (Lk 23:34) and with the "good thief" "**Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise**" (Lk 23: 43). Both of these highlight again the infinite mercy of God: from the Cross, Jesus begs His Father to forgive those who have unjustly condemned Him – and He even makes excuses for them ("they know not what they do") – and He calls a repentant sinner, in the last moments of His life, to new and eternal life.

As we continue to reflect on this Year of Mercy, may we allow the infinite merciful love of God to embrace us and forgive us our sins. May this Holy Week be truly HOLY for you, and may you enter into the great mystery of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday.