

Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday 2020 (April 5)

Year A RCL

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11

The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Saint Matthew 26:14- 27:66

“let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.”

By: The Rev. Fr. Fabian Villalobos

The pandemic situation in which we live provokes different human emotions and responses. Considering that each person interprets and lives it according to their own personal circumstances. We see doctors, nurses, medical staff and first responders trying to save people's lives, we see business owners dramatically trying to continue to open or to reopen, corporations showing how much they are losing each day that passes, workers struggling from being laid off, and many people donating funds or receiving food from one of the food banks across the US.

On the other hand, we see those who have no worries about their money, employment, business, and they try just to breath, literally breath, on their own, without ventilators. They are fighting to keep going and to be alive. We see families grieving and saying goodbye by cellphone or computer tablets to loved

ones who are dying alone in ICU rooms. We see the sad reality of many, too many, dying and being infected, each community, each neighborhood, each city is learning slowly of someone who is positive from coronavirus / COVID-19.

Today we understand that we cannot compare this pandemic situation with something from the past. We recognize that the virus has placed the whole world in a new scenario in which fear, uncertainties and despair are real because the securities are gone. Many feel the incapability to do something, while others verify with distress the loss of control over their own lives.

Do you think of this pandemic situation as overwhelming and want to return to the old way of living before COVID-19? It is in this context when we look into Jesus' life and realize it is worth all our time and efforts. Imagine for a moment, the feelings Jesus, the Son of Man and the Son of God, had knowing that He was going to die to save all humanity, including those who will betray or falsely accuse him. Imagine for a moment his glorious entrance in Jerusalem, the turmoil of the city which only a few days later becomes the accusing crowd that repeats over and over: "Let him be crucified!"

After the last supper Jesus went to a place called Gethsemane, and there was a garden, we hear from Bible scholars that this place was at the foot on the Mount of Olives opposite to the Kidron Valley. Jesus choose three of his disciples (the

same group that was present at his Transfiguration): Peter, James and John, to go with him. He asks them to pray while He himself goes a little farther to pray. The Gospel mentions how the three chosen ones fall asleep after Jesus expressed "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." Matthew 26:38

If there is something for us today that deserves our attention is to understand Jesus' suffering, his sense of impotence and at the same time his deep faith and abandonment into the Father's hands.

"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." Matthew 26:39

I believe this phrase fully expresses the sense of suffering, pain and trust Jesus was experiencing. This phrase needs to be our prayer in this time of distress. The "Cup" is symbol of the anguish and death Jesus was going to suffer. It represents all the things that we cannot control, all the sufferance that is part of our humanity in which our participation is essential and where we feel powerless.

"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." Matthew 26:39

The struggle is real, Jesus in prayer is asking to be spare of this moment where the flesh of his humanity shows how difficult it is for us to accept passively the sufferance of the death. Even if He was the Son of God, He was also fully human, He understands the silent cry of those in our ICU rooms and the agony of families and people who suffer all over the world. This prayer, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me" reminds us that there are levels of sufferance and discomfort, not only in the physical, but also the emotional and the spiritual.

Nevertheless, human beings are not the owners of their own lives (this is a great lesson from this Gospel!). Jesus knew the total dependence of the Father; in his prayer He calls to God the Father because He knows that only the Father has the power to change the circumstances. At the same time, Jesus is obedient, He trusts in God more than his own humanity, that's why He adds "yet not what I want but what you want."

Not what I want but what God wants, shows the abandonment and capacity to relinquish from his own wants and desires to allow God's will to totally take possession over his life. Jesus understand that what God wants ultimately is better than what his humanity desires.

In these days of the pandemic where we ask God's protection and relief for all, as we invoke His healing grace upon the humanity and pray Him to stop this "cup" of sufferance, it is opportune to realize following Jesus' prayer that more than ask God for what we want, we need to learn to submit to God. The invitation to surrender is not passive acceptation of the inevitable "cup" of pain, but active trust in God's love who all the time knows better as to what we need. After all, God answers our prayer always according to His knowledge and love, and this may or may not be exclusively for what we want or desire. Amen.