

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE**  
**APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES**  
**PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION**  
**BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION**  
**WASHINGTON, DC, MARCH 28, 2021**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to the United States, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis and express his spiritual closeness to you as we begin our journey together during this Holy Week. I assure you of His Holiness' prayers and paternal affection. As we begin Holy Week, I greet all those joining this liturgy by television and the internet and invite you to enter, with me, into the mystery of Christ's Passion.

The Church's liturgy refers to this Sunday as the Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, commemorating the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem which will lead to his Passion, Death, and ultimately, Resurrection. Although the liturgy began with the triumphal procession in which everyone sings "Hosanna", by the end of the week Christ will lay aside the glory and suffer as one condemned.

How could this have happened? Who is responsible for the torments He endured and the death He suffered upon the Cross? We cannot say that it was any one person acting alone. There was a confluence of forces: the envy and actions of the Pharisees; the falseness testimony of the Sanhedrin; the weakness of Jesus' disciples; the betrayal of Judas; and the denial of Simon Peter. The drama of the Passion indicates that it was not just one sin or one person's sin that contributed to Christ's Passion.

We are tempted to think that it was the sin of many *in that time*, thereby excusing ourselves, placing ourselves in the place of the crowd who sang "Hosannas" to the king who entered the city on a colt. Yet, Christ, who knew no sin was made sin for *us*. He bore the weight of the sin of the whole world. What is our responsibility? What is *my responsibility*? If I am not to blame, will I really share in the benefits of His offering to the Father? It is awareness that we are among the guilty that allows us, through the wondrous Mercy of God, to find ourselves among the redeemed, forgiven, and reconciled.

Just two weeks ago, we heard the Gospel from the third chapter of Saint John, in which Jesus spoke of the Son of Man being lifted high above the earth. At that time, Jesus referred to the story of the Israelites who complained against God and Moses. Serpents bit the people and many died, until Moses mounted the image of the serpent on a pole and all who looked at it were healed. The serpent is an image of sin, and those who beheld it saw the grotesque nature of sin and infidelity, a necessary step to authentic conversion and to faithfulness to God. The image of the serpent on the pole shows our reality as creatures, wounded and redeemed. It demonstrates that we are sick persons, and the sickness leads to death, even an eternal death.

Last year on Palm Sunday, Pope Francis said:

"If we are honest with ourselves, we will see our infidelities. How many falsehoods, hypocrisies and duplicities! How many good intentions betrayed! How many broken promises! How many resolutions left unfulfilled! The Lord knows our hearts better than

we do. He knows how weak and irresolute we are, how many times we fall, how hard it is for us to get up and how difficult it is to heal certain wounds. And what did he do in order to come to our aid and serve us? He told us through the Prophet: *"I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them deeply"* (Hos 14:5). He healed us by taking upon himself our infidelity and by taking from us our betrayals. Instead of being discouraged by the fear of failing, we can now look upon the crucifix, feel his embrace, and say: "Behold, there is my infidelity, you took it, Jesus, upon yourself. You open your arms to me, you serve me with your love, you continue to support me... And so I will keep pressing on". (HOMILY, PALM SUNDAY, 5 APRIL 2020)

This image of the serpent on a pole also shows that there is a remedy for our infidelity: looking to the Son of Man, raised on the cross. This is the only cure: the love of God. The love of God is there on the cross: nothing else can heal us but this crucified Love, the total gift of self that the Father makes by giving us the Son. But only those who lift up their eyes, stand before such a God, and accept their responsibility can be saved.

Seeing this crucified love, we begin to understand that the spotless, sinless, innocent Lamb took our place. He entered Jerusalem fully aware that He would have to suffer, but still He went, because His love for each of us was so great. He allowed Himself to be judged, condemned, spat upon, mocked, and scourged by the guilty in order to save them. To satisfy Divine Justice and to atone for our folly, He took the place of sinners, making reparation for our sin and reconciling us to the Father. This is part of the Father's plan to save us and to show forth the Divine Mercy.

As we enter into this Holy Week, in which we recall the Savior's Passion, we also look forward in hope to beholding the Risen Christ, who has died to sin but who is now alive. It is the Risen Lord who reminds us that our sins have lost the power to destroy us, *if* we believe in Him, repent, and humble ourselves to receive the gift of His Mercy, that is, if we die to our sins. If we die to our sins, we will share in His Resurrection and experience the fruits of this wondrous, Crucified Love.

As we journey through this Holy Week in this Basilica, let us recall the presence of the Mother of God who journeys with us. I conclude with the beautiful prayer for Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent: "O God, who in this season, give your Church the grace to imitate devoutly the Blessed Virgin Mary in contemplating the Passion of Christ, grant, we pray, through her intercession, that we may cling more firmly each day to your only-begotten Son and come at last to the fullness of His grace." Amen.