

**Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion B - "I will follow Him". But were you there when .....**  
March 28, 2021.

Remember the lyrics of the finale song in the 1992 Whoopi Goldberg movie "Sister Act" "I will follow him"? **"I will follow him, Follow him wherever he may go. And near him, I always will be For nothing can keep me away He is my destiny. I will follow him. Ever since he touched my heart I knew. There isn't an ocean too deep. A mountain so high it can keep Keep me away Away from his love."** But were you there when they ....

With so much going on in the world, it may seem almost impossible to insist on giving so much time and energy to the religious observance of Holy Week. This is especially true with the pandemic that most churches still cannot gather as a community. Holy Week itself may be a bit out of touch with the world around us. Hopefully, the COVID vaccinations can eventually bring us back to some normalcy. We alone do not have precise answers for the human suffering that we see around us or where to find hope. What we do know, however, is that the stories of our families, our country, our faith are the eyeglasses that help us see ourselves and our place in our world and what is hopeless and what is redeemable.

In the Gospel, there is one "participant" who accompanied Jesus through all the length of his days. This "character" was present at Bethlehem in the Nativity and during all of the events of Holy Week right up to and after the Crucifixion. We are speaking of **The Crowd**. This gathering of the poor, the rich, the ragtag, the sophisticated, the men and the women, old and young, reaches one of its most powerful and memorable moments in the great events of this day. Are we part of it? Our collective imagination and racial memory can take us there and then.

We were certainly at Bethlehem. We had come from villages and towns, cities and farms from around the countryside answering the summons of Roman overlords. We filled the streets of Bethlehem as well as the inns. Our noise drowned out the routine sounds of the place and our appetite emptied the stalls of the vendors in the market. We paid our taxes and went home. Or, we heard the song of the angels and visited a stable. We were there at Jerusalem for the festivals of the Passover. We were there twelve years after Bethlehem when the boy Jesus became separated from his parents by remaining behind in the temple. We heard the calls of Mary and Joseph as they searched and felt their tugs on our sleeves as they asked, "have you seen our son?" They found him in the temple and disappeared again into the rest of us on the road back to Nazareth. We were at the banks of the Jordan with John the Baptizer. Jesus the man came among us and entered the water of the river. We saw the opening of the heavens over his head and heard the voice of the thunder. Some of us followed him to the edge of the desert and watched as he disappeared into the wilderness. We were there when the paralytic was lowered through the roof to be healed, when Zaccheus had to climb the tree to see over our heads, when 5000 of us were hungry on the hillside. And we were there today as Christ entered Jerusalem riding on the back of a donkey. The road was dusty and cloaks and palm branches were placed where the donkey could step on and the dust would not be raised. We were deep in number at the side of the road and the noise was great. We thought he was our King.

It has been said that every Jewish person has a part in the Exodus event, that something of this magnitude echoes through the ages gathering in participants as the memory moves through time. It has also been said that all Christians are present at the foot of the cross, redeemed in a single moment of sacrifice. Are we following him wherever he may go? Are we there standing with the crowd as it moved from Bethlehem and the Nativity to Jerusalem and Holy Week, we know who Jesus is – or, who we want him to be, we know how the story ends. Our faith and our baptism placed us in this history. That placement comes with price and responsibility. Jesus paid the price. The responsibility is ours. So, what are we called to do? We are called to stand in solidarity with the thousands and millions of us. Our commonality is the

searching, the seeking, the yearning for the sort of love and peace which only Christ can give. That longing for union with a force greater than ourselves is part of the human condition. To recognize that in ourselves and in all people should result in a desire to help that union to happen. This would mean to eliminate forces which come between a person and God, forces such as war, hunger, disease, violence in all of its forms, illnesses of mind and body, and ignorance of the Gospel. These things need our attention. We are called by God and challenged by the Gospel to address each of those mighty separations. We especially need to share the story, most critically with the young, so that it may continue its march through the ages offering grace and salvation.

To say, "yes," to Christ is to be confronted daily by decisions and choices which we know should be made in a believing context. How we spend our money, use our time, raise our children, serve others, work for justice and mercy for all people, and approach our own deaths should beg the question, "what would Jesus have me do?" This can be threatening and challenging. But, we're not there yet. We haven't arrived at the Garden Tomb on Easter morning. Holy Week looms ahead in all of its darkness and despair. Jesus had to do it and so do we. We should pay careful attention to this weighty task. The cross and then the crown. We must find it within ourselves to remain beside the donkey and the man and be with him in the temple and the garden and on Golgotha. This is the Jesus whom we must face. The bleeding and bruised Good Shepherd who has carried all of his sheep on his shoulders since time began. We must not let him go on alone. We need to follow him. Going from spectator to follower is a gift of the Spirit. Today let's ask the Spirit for the gift of allowing us to be transformed by Him to be, with others, a protagonist and not a mere spectator in the construction of the kingdom of God.

In the coming Holy Week, let's pause for 30 minutes every day to meditate on the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark (14:1-15:47) verse by verse and reflect on the hymn we sing during the Way of the Cross: **"Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree? Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree? Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree? Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb? Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb? Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?"**