

## Palm (Passion) Sunday

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading;** Isaiah 50; 4 – 7

**Psalm; 21.** My God, my God, who have you forsaken me?

**2<sup>nd</sup> Reading;** Philippians 2; 6 – 11

**Gospel;** Matthew 26; 14 – 27; 66

We enter the week of the crowds.

Usually, we gather outside the church this weekend – Fr Joe does his best voice projection and flings the Holy Water far and wide to ensure that every palm (and person) feels the water hitting them. Then we process singing, as best we can, into the church. It always takes a bit of time and we are not always the most organised crowd.

Then the crowd shouts out during the reading of the Passion; ‘Crucify him!’ and jeers and mocks as we hear of Jesus being led through the streets.

And then the crowd melts away, leaving just a handful of people at the cross.

What we would give to be in a crowd now ..... Not to have to cross the street to avoid people on our daily walk or space ourselves out in the queue at the supermarket .... To be able to speak to people at close quarters rather than with a wall in-between us to allow for the requisite two metres (which I am told is the equivalent of Jurgen Klopp laid down between the two people).

Sometimes the crowd is too much, but a crowd would be nice at the moment.

Instead of being in the crowd, we are maybe coming close to experiencing the isolation that we witness Jesus enduring this week.

Being led to the cross is one thing – but enduring that whilst being left alone adds another dimension of suffering.

In the Garden – left alone in agony while the disciples sleep

At arrest and trial – seeing no-one stand up to plead his cause

As he walks the way of the cross – disciples elsewhere after having denied knowing him

And at the cross – only Mary, John and Mary to be with him.

Of course, our isolation is not on that level.

We are able to surround ourselves with the comforts in our home, we may have people willing to run errands for us, we are ‘connected’ by phone, Zoom, FaceTime .....

It is not as if we experience the alone-ness of Jesus, but we know that He knows what effect isolation has on us – and for some it will be a more distressing and profound experience than for others.

His ‘patient suffering’ referred to in the opening prayer of this weekend’s Mass gives an insight into both what we might be experiencing – the suffering of being cut off – and an insight into the gift and grace we might need in abundance now ... patience.

In a time of anxiety and uncertainty, to sit through it is only possible if we know that all things will pass – this too will pass.

The crowd will gather again – those who have gathered at a graveside for a burial will be able to come together to celebrate a loved one’s passing ..... the home schoolers will cram into the hall for assembly ..... the empty shell

that is Sacred Heart Church will be filled again with our chatter and prayer ..... the pilgrims will walk en masse to the City Ground .....

For this week, we remain alone – witness to His alone-ness – but know that the disciples did gather again, did leave the room where they had locked themselves away, the world that came to an end when the heavens shook and the veil of the Temple was torn in two and the tomb was sealed – that world did begin again with a new life.

Pope Francis said that ‘The patience of God waits with us and accompanies us. It is the bearing of suffering with joy and hope’.

For the patience of God, we give thanks, and ask for the grace of patience, joy and hope that as the crowd has melted away, with the resurrection, we will be together again soon.

## **Intercessions**

In hope and trust, we place all our prayers before our loving Father.

We pray for all those who have been revealed to be the true heroes of our society; NHS and care workers, delivery drivers, emergency services, charities and food bank workers, supermarket checkout staff, teachers and school staff ..... that we will never forget the true value of their work and vocation and always acknowledge their importance.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Let us pray for those who are affected by the current pandemic, that they will recover soon. We remember in particular people across the world who do not have access to healthcare as we do. We pray that this crisis will lead to a more just world.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

For ourselves as we begin Holy Week; that it will be a time of grace and remind us of the power and importance of being together as a community of faith. Let us pray for those in our own community and area who are particularly vulnerable; the housebound, elderly and families struggling to make ends meet – they will experience the help and solidarity they need from their communities.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for everyone who has died as a result of the pandemic and everyone who has died recently; Fr John Berry, Cliff Connor, Jessie Johnston and Antoinette Ciok; that they will rest in peace.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

In a moment of silence, we call to mind those who have asked for or need our prayers.

We ask Mary, who was the faithful disciple of her Son, to pray with and for us; Hail Mary