

PALM SUNDAY

HOMILY

2012

Today as we listen to the Passion from the Gospel of St Mark, we begin our Holy Week celebrations. In his powerfully direct narrative of the Lord's passion and death we are taken direct to the heart of Holy Week.

During these days we will strive to follow closely in the footsteps of the Lord for by sharing in the Church's liturgy, we share in its saving reality in our lives.

Throughout the weeks of Lent we have been preparing for this most solemn week. There is one point from this pathway of preparation that I would like to hold before you this morning. I ask you to keep in your minds throughout this week. It is this.

In looking upon Jesus, in following his journey, we are to remember above all that he is the one whom the Father has sent into the world. But there is even more. This Jesus to whom we give our undivided attention is of one being with the Father. To attend to him is to attend to the Father. To honour him is to honour the Father. He and the Father are one. That is the truth that we are to remember and keep in our hearts.

During the weeks of Lent we have often listened to the Gospel of St John who, over and over again, stresses this utterly unique relationship between the Father and the Son. He tells us that just as the Father has life in himself, so too does the Son have life in himself. He tells us that just as the Father is the judge, so too he has given all judgement to the Son. Repeatedly, Jesus points to his own divinity. Most memorably he said, 'Before Abraham was, I Am.' It is an answer, the phrase 'I Am', that proclaims his divine nature. It was well understood in that way. Those who heard it picked up stones to punish Jesus, to put him to death as a blasphemer.

And we too, here today, are faced with that dilemma: either we accept Jesus in his divinity or we reject him as a blasphemer.

We accept him as the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Blessed Trinity. We see his actions; they are the actions of God. We hear his words; they are the words of God. He is the Lord of life. He is the giver of life. He is our divine saviour. To accept Jesus in this way is the gift of faith. It is a gift of God and one for which we pray and give thanks. That is echoed in today's first reading from the prophet Isaiah.

He tells us that it is God who gives us the ear of the disciple with which to listen to His word, God who gives us the disciples' tongue to speak of Him and to praise Him.

In the second reading we heard how Jesus, whose state was divine, did not cling to that state but humbled himself, taking on the form of a slave and was humbler yet, even to accepting death on the cross. Yet we must remember that in this Jesus did not lose his divine nature. He let go of the state or the glory of divinity, not the reality of it. In Jesus that divine nature is wonderfully joined to his human nature, so that in his person, in his humanity, the divinity of Jesus is never lost or put aside. This is so important to remember as we follow in his steps. Jesus is the one whom the Father has

sent: one with the Father in divinity; one with us in our humanity. This is the secret of our salvation. For if Jesus is not divine he cannot overcome the reality and power of sin. No mere human being could do that. And if Jesus is not fully human, he cannot share with us the fruit of his victory for it would remain a glory of his Godhead but way beyond our reach.

This, then, is the challenge and invitation of this Holy Week: to accept that Jesus, the man of sorrows, is the truth of God; to accept his way of living, whatever it involves, to be the way of life; and to accept the help, the grace, he gives us. This help, this grace, starts with the work of forgiveness, in the Sacraments of baptism and Reconciliation. They are very much part of our Holy Week journey. Through the power of that grace we may indeed be his disciples and, by the power of that grace alone, be brought to salvation.

May the Lord bless us this Holy Week and bring us to the joys of our Eternal Easter.

Amen

+Vincent Nichols