

V LENT 2015 (PASSION SUNDAY)
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
HEBREWS 9.11 St. JOHN 8.46

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The church looks different today. The bright rose-colored vestments of Refreshment Sunday have once again been replaced by more somber violet vestments...and there are no flowers at the Altar.

We are now in the final two weeks of Lent...called Passiontide. The most striking visual feature in the church we see throughout Passiontide...all of the crucifixes, statues and icons are veiled. This reminds us of what the Gospel tells us...when his accusers picked up stones to throw at Jesus...he went and "hid himself".

Passion means endurance...suffering. Jesus endured the humiliation of being stripped naked and laughed at like some kind of circus act. He suffered an ignominious death on the cross. He was executed like a common criminal. And everything he endured and suffered...was not for himself...it was for us.

Mary and Joseph also endured and suffered. Forty days after Jesus was born they brought him to the Temple. Neither understood completely the words Simeon spoke when he thanked God for fulfilling his promise to him...and he held the Salvation of the World in his hands. Mary wondered what Simeon meant when he told her sorrow, like a sharp sword, would break her own heart.

When he was twelve years old, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, while Mary and Joseph began the long journey home to Nazareth. When they found Jesus missing, they endured the three-day search for him...they suffered parent's worst fears, before finding him safe and secure in the Temple.

Mary endured and suffered along with Jesus the final hours of his life on earth. She witnessed what no mother should ever have to witness...the public humiliation and execution of her son. She would now understand the meaning of Simeon's prophetic words...and her own heart was broken.

Joseph was not there at the crucifixion. He probably died many years earlier. But Joseph endured and suffered along with Mary as he raised Jesus as his own much-loved son.

Scripture tells us what Joseph thought and did...not anything he said. His endurance and suffering was to silently obey God's will...to faithfully and joyfully go about his work...providing for Mary and Jesus...giving of himself for them...loving them.

What about our own Lenten Journey...our own Passiontide...our own time of endurance and suffering? Lent and Passiontide are much more than seasons of the Church Year we go through on our way to Easter. They should for us become rich and meaningful times to share with Jesus the journey he took to the cross.

Over the next two weeks we will act out liturgically the drama of the final two weeks of Jesus' earthly life. Jesus knew things were getting serious...he knew what was going to happen to him. We should welcome and embrace this time of serious personal spiritual reflection...as we prepare ourselves for the events about to take place...here...now...in this place.

Think of this building as Jerusalem. We are there on that first Palm Sunday to watch Jesus ride a donkey triumphantly into the city...just as Zechariah prophesied 600 years earlier when he wrote Our King would come to us sitting on a donkey. We will carry palms and process around the church and sing "Glory to our King." And we will be the crowd shouting, "Kill him. He is not our real king." But he is!

Things will be different on Maundy Thursday. Jesus will give us a new Commandment...to love each other as much as he loves us. Are we willing to do that? Will we show him how much we love him by loving others? And he will give us his own Flesh and Blood...to sustain us...at the First Mass ever. Then the Garden is ready...will we watch with him...as the lights are turned off...it is dark.

We come to Good Friday. The Passion of Jesus...his endurance and suffering for us...concludes on a hill outside of Jerusalem...only Jerusalem is here and now. Jesus is the Great High Priest...offering himself to God...for the forgiveness of sins.

What Jesus did...he did for us. What are we now ready to do for him?

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