

V LENT 2020 (PASSION SUNDAY)
SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
HEBREWS 9.11-15 St. JOHN 8.46-59



Jesus has just claimed to be “I AM”...God’s name for himself in the Book of Exodus. When God called Moses to lead his people out of Egypt...God told Moses to tell the Israelites “I am who I am” sent him. He told Moses to tell them: “The one who is called ‘I AM’ has sent him. And I, the Lord, am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is my name forever.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus has upped the ante with the religious leaders who have accused him of being a Samaritan and a devil. The religious leaders believed because they were descended from Abraham...that was sufficient to guarantee them seats in heaven.

Jesus tells them because they dishonor God they are really acting like the devil’s disciples themselves. He tells them if they really understood the Scriptures...they would know Abraham was happy because he saw his coming.

The religious leaders dismissed Jesus’ argument by saying he wasn’t even 50 years old...how could he have seen Abraham? Jesus’ reply enraged them, “Before Abraham was...I AM”. By claiming to have existed before Abraham lived...Jesus claimed to be God. The people started to throw rocks at him...but he went into hiding.

We’re now commencing the final two weeks of the Lenten Season called Passiontide. “Passion” means “suffering” or “endurance”. The custom of covering crucifixes, statues and icons with purple veils during Passiontide comes from the Gospel where Jesus hid himself from the authorities.

During the last weeks of his life on Earth, Jesus told his disciples they were going to Jerusalem. He told them he was going to be turned over to the police, and eventually end up executed. The disciples didn’t want to hear anything about Jesus dying. That’s because they hadn’t yet figured out who he was, the Son of God.

Jesus tells us the whole reason he came to us was to set us right with God the Father, and to establish a new covenant. A covenant is a

relationship based on a promise that can never be broken. Covenants in ancient times always involved the shedding of blood. The way Jesus puts us right with God the Father is through the shedding of his own blood.

The Letter to the Hebrews talks about the sacrifices the priest in the Jewish Temple made for the people. They repeated the sacrifices every year, which is what they were supposed to do. But the sacrifices the Temple priest offered could only forgive people’s sins for a short period of time. They couldn’t change people’s hearts. They couldn’t forgive sins forever and set us right with God.

Jesus has forever taken away the need to have the kind of sacrifice that took place in the Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus’ death on the cross was a one-time event that can’t be repeated. He is the “one oblation of himself once offered...a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction...for the sins of the whole world. Jesus has accomplished for us what no Temple sacrifice could accomplish...true forgiveness of our sins.

Passiontide is about Jesus suffering the death of a common criminal on the Cross. It’s a message his disciples didn’t want to hear and to some extent we don’t want to hear. His suffering didn’t last, and neither does ours. The new covenant, the new promise we have with God is that we will one day be with him in heaven. Jesus made it all possible.

This year Passiontide takes on added meaning as we continue our own “forced hiding” shelter-in-place. This may our time of suffering and endurance...it does not have to be a time without joy and hope.

But Passiontide is more than just the two weeks we go through before Easter. It’s a time for us to acknowledge what Jesus has done for us, and to thank him for the gift of New Life he has given us by forgiving our sins.

New Life in Jesus is a good thing. Passiontide is not a time to be depressed or sorrowful. It is a time to remember the true gift of Love Jesus showed for us...and the peace and joy we receive from his Love.

