

V Lent 2023 (Passion Sunday)
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
Hebrews 9.11-15 St. John 8.46-59

✠

Things look quite a bit different in the church today. Flowers are gone from the High Altar. Violet vestments have replaced the rose-colored vestments of last Sunday. Yes...things look quite a bit different.

The *Book of Common Prayer* designates the final two weeks of the Lenten Season, "Passiontide". **Passion** means **suffering** and **endurance**. Movies such as Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ (released in 2004)* graphically depict Jesus' suffering and endurance during the last few hours before his death.

During our Lenten journey to the cross, we recreate through our Liturgies, Christ's passion and endurance. We reenact the drama that played out 2000 years ago. We are there with Jesus and he is here with us now...in this place. We have to remind ourselves everything Jesus went through was for us.

Jesus told his followers he was going to have to go to Jerusalem, where he would be arrested, put on trial, and condemned to death. He continues to teach and heal people. His encounters with the religious leaders become more hostile...Jesus knows his time on earth is short.

The religious leaders accuse Jesus of having a demon. Jesus dismisses their accusation and tells them they are dishonoring God...their actions show they really don't know him. Jesus says he is telling the truth about his relationship with the Father...and those who listen to him will never die.

Things are about to go from bad to worse. The religious leaders laugh at Jesus' claim that whoever listens to him will never die. How could he make such a claim since Abraham and the prophets are all dead? But Jesus tells them Abraham is happy because he has seen the time of his coming.

More laughter from the religious leaders...Jesus isn't even fifty years old...how can he have seen Abraham? Then Jesus said before Abraham even existed..."I am". Jesus has just signed his own death warrant.

"I am" is the Name reserved for God and God alone. It was a Name that was never said out loud. When Jesus calls himself "I am" he is saying, "God has always existed, I have always existed, I am God".

This was too much for the religious leaders to hear...they picked up stones to throw at Jesus...but he hid behind veils in the Temple...we visually recall Jesus going into hiding by veiling crucifixes, statues and icons in the church.

Jesus has now set himself on a course he can't reverse. There is no turning back. Jesus must complete his mission...he must be the sacrificial Lamb of God...who takes away the sins of the world.

The Jewish priests offered sacrifices in the Temple so people's sins could be forgiven. The forgiveness of sins was temporary. The sacrifices had to be repeated over and over again. Jesus is the Great High Priest...better than any priest on earth. He is also the sacrifice...and he is God. The sacrifice Jesus made on the Cross was the "full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice..." for the sins of the whole world. It can never be repeated.

For the next two weeks we are going to be thinking more about what Jesus is getting ready to do for us on Good Friday. Jesus is the ultimate example of endurance and suffering. The question we should be asking ourselves over the next two weeks is how much more are we willing to do for Jesus? We know he is God's Son, because we have the Holy Spirit who helps us see Jesus for who he really is.

In the epistle we read, "They which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance". The word "Church" means "those who have been called". We have been called into a special relationship with God through his Son, Jesus.

Our journey with Jesus to the cross continues. His promise of eternal life makes any endurance and suffering we might experience during this lifetime a privilege.

Like Abraham...we are happy because we have seen the day of Jesus' coming.

✠