

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
PALM SUNDAY
BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
WASHINGTON, D.C.
APRIL 10, 2022

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, I greet you in the name of the Holy Father Pope Francis and express his spiritual closeness and paternal affection for all gathered here and for all those joining us by television and radio, as we begin this holiest week of the liturgical year.

Our liturgy began with the solemn procession with palms. This procession bears witness to our faith in Jesus Christ, who is the King of Kings and Prince of Peace. In St. Luke's Gospel, which we heard at the start of the liturgy, Jesus is journeying up to Jerusalem. His procession from the Mount of Olives to the Holy City reminds us of the coronation for the Kings of Israel.

Jesus is a King who is on a journey. He is going up to Jerusalem to fulfill the Father's Plan for our salvation. He goes to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with His friends, recalling Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt. Already on the Second Sunday of Lent, we heard how Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah of His own exodus. He Himself will be the new Passover Lamb and our true Exodus from death to life. Jesus' journey, which seemingly ends in Death, will continue in His descent among the dead and His glorious Resurrection.

Throughout this year, I have been traveling throughout this country, speaking about "synodality," or journeying together. Synodality involves walking together, listening to each other and listening to God, and discerning the path in which we must walk, guided by the Holy Spirit, and eventually making choices. This week is a time for us to journey together and to journey with Jesus, as we recall His Passion and Death, and to make a decisive choice for Christ.

On Holy Thursday, we recall Christ's institution of the Priesthood and the Eucharist, both of which point us to the closeness of our God along our own spiritual journey. We will enter more deeply into His sacrifice at Calvary, meditating upon His patient suffering, fidelity and obedience, for which the Father exalted Him. During His Passion, and we understand this when we pray the Stations of the Cross, there are people – Mary, some women, Veronica, Simon of Cyrene – who accompany Jesus along the way. Holy Week is a privileged time to walk with Jesus along the way that leads to glory, even if that way includes the Cross.

The week concludes with the great Easter Vigil, recalling God's saving deeds in history, culminating in Christ's Triumphant Resurrection. His journey, and our sharing in it, leads us to newness of life. This will be experienced especially by all those who have been preparing for baptism or entrance into full communion with the Catholic Church throughout this year.

Holy Week is a privileged time, and we should not underestimate the gift of time. One of God's most precious gifts is time. St. Bernadine of Siena said that a moment of time is infinitely valuable, because in one moment of time a person can, by an act of love, gain God's grace and even heaven. Consider the

good thief, who, said, *“Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”* In a single moment, his soul was saved, for Jesus said, *“My son, this day you will be with me in Paradise.”*

At the beginning of Lent, we heard, *“This is the acceptable time. This is the day of salvation.”* Those in hell would certainly pay any price if they had even one moment of time to tell God how much they love him, but this moment will never come. In recounting the events of our salvation, our hearts can be moved to return once more to the Lord to experience His saving mercy.

There is nothing more precious than time; nevertheless, there is nothing less prized. Time is precious but neglected. Some people spend whole days doing little or nothing at all. If you ask them what they are doing, they say, *“Oh, we’re just killing time.”* Others spend long hours in useless conversation and chatter. If you ask them what they are doing, they say, *“Oh, we’re just passing the time.”* So much time is wasted! They will never have that time back to do something worthwhile or good. Yet when the hour of their death draws near, how they will beg God for more time! The time to prepare for the next life is now.

People prepare for all kinds of things. Students prepare for their exams. Those on trial prepare their defense long before their hearing. Military leaders would be considered foolish if they waited until the time of attack before amassing supplies and preparing a defense. The Book of Sirach says: *“Do your work in good time, and in his own time God will give you your reward.”* Any time not spent in some way for God is lost time - time in which we could gain treasures for eternity. If someone promised you all the money you could count in a day, wouldn’t you make the most of that one day? God promises us more than money. He promises us eternity.

This week is a privileged time to prepare for eternity. The remembrance of these salvific events should also awaken in us a lively sense of the present journey of faith. As the liturgy began, we followed in procession. What does this “following” mean? It means using this time to change our life to follow along the way of the Lord Jesus. In Luke’s Gospel, after the miracle of the great catch of fish, Jesus called the fishermen to follow Him. They left everything to follow Him, because Jesus offered them a new way of living.

Jesus invites us this week to leave everything to follow Him and to renew our commitment to Him. His way of humility shows us the way to really experience the good life – the abundant life. It is not a matter of career, usefulness, worldly success and admiration. To follow Jesus means to commit myself to something greater than myself. Following Him means losing myself in the service of truth and love, losing myself in the service of my neighbor. In losing ourselves for Him and in Him in this time, we find ourselves and discover the path of Life, not only in history but for eternity.

As I speak about synodality and journeying together throughout the country, people often ask, *“Well, if we are on the road, where are we going?”* We are heading toward the New and Eternal Jerusalem and to arrive there we need to encounter the Lord Jesus, who is our Way. His Way leads to Paradise by passing through the agony of the Cross. Through His Death and Resurrection, He has opened for us the gates to Paradise.

Therefore, let us heed the words of St. Andrew of Crete, *“Come then, let us run with Him as He presses on to His Passion. Let us imitate those who have gone out to meet Him, not scattering olive*

branches or garments or palms in His path but spreading ourselves before Him as best we can, with humility of soul and upright purpose.”