We make this a holy week

Palm Sunday 2017

Today marks the beginning of Holy Week, the most sacred week of our Christian year. The ceremonies of this day take us to two places – the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and then to the events of Good Friday (the passion and death of the Lord). The Liturgy of the Mass takes us quickly from Palm Sunday to Passion Sunday.

We have just solemnly read the account by St Matthew of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do we not find ourselves reduced to silence as we hear the description of the terrible sufferings of the Lord? This is the Son of God. This is the one who entered our human condition as an act of mercy and love. This is Jesus of Nazareth who only did good, healing the sick, comforting the suffering, bring hope and light. This is the compassionate good shepherd willing to lay down his life for his sheep. The reading takes us to Calvary and we stand before the Cross. We look on unbelieving, struggling to grasp why this had to happen like this.

We are moved, deeply moved by our awareness that this is what God has been prepared to do for us, cut off from him because of our sin. Next Friday we will once again visit this story, listening to St John give us his moving account. He was there. He witnessed it all. He stood with Mary, the mother of Jesus, beholding the terrible suffering of the Lord. His graphic account will stir our hearts once again and we will have a means to show our profound gratitude as we come forward to venerate the cross.

The Lord said on one occasion, “When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all to myself” (Jn 12:32). In the end it is to the crucified Christ that we are drawn. Yes, we are inspired by the Lord’s wonderful teachings. Yes, we are moved by his many acts of compassion and mercy. Yes, we stand in admiration at the witness of his life.

However, it is the cross that strangely attracts us. It is the cross that is the first and final symbol of Christianity. We struggle to understand why Jesus had to do this for us. We are caught up in the idea that the shepherd has been willing to lay down his life for his sheep. We know there is a love being expressed here that is beyond our comprehension.

It is Palm Sunday. We are beginning Holy Week. We are being beckoned to enter into the mystery of the redemptive acts of Jesus Christ. We need to be with him this week – we need to be at the Last Supper on Holy Thursday; we need to attend the Stations of the Cross and then the Solemn Commemoration on Good Friday, and then celebrate with joy the resurrection of the Lord at the Easter Vigil ceremony on Holy Saturday night or Sunday morning.

As Christians this is our most sacred time. This coming week is a time of special grace for us as we contemplate the wondrous mystery of the Lord’s death and resurrection. This is a time for each of us to be reborn in our faith.

Let us make this coming week a holy week.

Archbishop Julian Porteous

Saturday, April 8, 2017