

## Homily for Palm Sunday 2021

Every Jewish person wanted to go to Jerusalem for Passover. A man named Simon from Cyrene must have been thrilled to be in Jerusalem, praying that this would be a holy Passover feast.

Now, Jerusalem was always crowded at Passover... but this crowd was different. People were shouting, "Crucify him!" They were angry.

Jesus was feeling too weak to carry his cross, they had beaten him and he was losing so much blood. And the crowd kept shouting: crucify him!

A Roman soldier grabbed Simon and said to him "Carry the cross."

Maybe Simon tried to complain, but Roman soldiers expected obedience. So Simon picked up the cross. A cross he did not deserve. A cross that made no sense.

And then... they started to walk. Simon, and Jesus. Both of them suffering. Both burdened.

Maybe every human being has a moment when the cross is handed to us. We don't deserve it. It makes no sense. Then one thing becomes clear – we are not walking alone.

As Simon carried the cross, he was walking with Jesus. As you carry your cross, you are walking with Jesus. Look for him. That's where peace and strength are found.

A cross is only really a cross when the one who carries it can honestly shout to God, "I don't deserve this."

Jesus didn't deserve the crucifixion. But it happened. Simon didn't deserve to carry the cross. But it happened.

You don't 'deserve' your cancer, your depression... you don't deserve the loss of your job, the loss of your love one, your spouse abandoning you, your family crisis... you don't deserve broken hearts, broken dreams, abuse, suffering. But it happens. The cross gets handed to you.

And you pick it up. And you put one foot in front of the other. And you slowly realize – you are not walking alone.

Jesus is walking beside you. The One whose hands were nailed is waving you forward. Jesus, the one whose heart was pierced with a sword is loving you in ways you never paid attention to before. And Jesus who rose from the dead is promising you that you will rise too.

And how else could God teach Simon that the greatest gift we can give to one another is to help our brothers and sisters to carry their crosses?

When you see people who are burdened by the unfairness of life and are struggling under the weight of an undeserved cross, then you don't need someone to tell you what to do.

You "pick it up. Help them carry it. You're not alone." No one should be.

On that Palm Sunday, Jesus saw what was coming: death. He could have turned away, but he went forward, trusting that his 'Abba, Father,' was with him.

For us, there are times in life when challenging things happen suddenly, our first instinct is to... escape.

You start a job, but then you see how much effort it will require. You're tempted to stop and take a different direction.

You get married, and then you begin to see what love is going to require. You're going to have to give more than you thought and change more than you want... you're tempted to escape.

Someone you love gets sick. You see what's coming: the care-giving, the hard tasks. Or maybe YOU get sick, and you see what's coming. The treatment. The rehab. You're tempted to hide.

You draw closer to Christ. Then you see what's coming. Christ is going to ask you to love your enemy! He's going to ask you to care for the poor; to forgive; to put people ahead of money; to stop being angry, to defend human life. It's going to be hard. You're tempted to flee.

When you are tempted to run from what love requires, when you are tempted to escape the hard thing that life has handed you, the crucified and risen one says to you, "come on. Follow me. We'll do this together."

This holy week, we focus on Jesus Christ, who loved us so much that he did not run from the consequences of loving us. He paid the price to stay faithful. He gave everything...for us. He taught us how to stay where we should stay, to go where we should go, and be who we should be. Turn to him. Pray to him. Follow him. He will lead you, through the cross, through death, to life. He always gives us the strength and the grace to do what love requires.

May Christ help us to become a channel of his truth, justice, forgiveness, holiness, grace, peace, and love.

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