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“Holy Week to Meditate on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ”

The Holy Catholic Church exhorts us to assist at the commemoration of the events of the First Holy Week. These are events which can never be sufficiently appreciated, and which can never be fully appraised during our earthly life because they are a consequence of the fundamental mysteries of our religion and of the profoundest of all mysteries: the Mystery of God's love for us, giving His only begotten son in propitiatory sacrifice in order to enter in eternal salvation.

Do we realize how privileged we are? Do we always show the gratitude we owe to the Blessed Lord who so loved us as to give His only-begotten Son for us? Do we think often enough on the sufferings the Son of God endured for our eternal salvation during His thirty-three years on this earth, but especially during the last three days of His earthly life?

Nevertheless, an unbeliever person is not the man who knows not God because he has not learned of Him. Rather he is the man who knows of God while failing to admit, due to pride, the obligations of reverence and obedience to God, which arise from the knowledge of God. Such an unbeliever knows he is in the wrong path, and he bitterly rejects God for existing. So putting himself on the wrong way, he also bitterly fights all institutions and individuals who remind him of God's existence and his own dereliction of duty.

Actually, the pattern - followed by all the enemies of Christ and the things concerning Christ - is identical in all ages with that one followed by the Pharisees we read about in today's Gospel. The followers of Christ are slandered and calumniated as impostors and frauds, hypocrites and self-seekers, as enemies of the people and being in league with the devil as well. Indeed, the pattern is the same because its driving force is the same one: Satan.

On the other hand, there is no devotion so well practice to impress the heart of a Christian person, with so deep a sense of sorrow and contrition for his sins, or to inflame his soul with so burning a love for God as devout meditation on the sacred Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. As Saint Bonaventure says, *“the wounds of Jesus wound the hardest hearts and inflame the coldest souls.”* And Saint Augustine: *“the crucifix is not only the deathbed, but also the pulpit of Christ.”* From this holy pulpit He preaches to us, with unmistakable accents, His Gospel of love for human souls. The love of God for men is the great secret and mystery of the Passion.

One of the most popular and practical manners of keeping a devout attitude of prayer and penance is the Stations of the Cross. The first devout person of this practice has been the Blessed Virgin Mary, who travel again over that sorrowful way and visit with indescribable understanding those sacred spots that had been hallowed by the most precious Blood of her son – Our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostles, the disciples, and the holy women followed her example. They often in her company went over, again and again, in body and reconstructed in their minds the various scenes of the tragedy on the Calvary.

In fact, pious and edifying is such a practice that the Catholic Church has always encouraged, by every means in her power, and she has granted numerous indulgences and favors, which in general are the very same as if one could perform the actual Way of the Cross in Jerusalem itself by visiting the physical holy places. These indulgences may also be applied for the benefit of the souls in purgatory.

Some conditions are attached in order to receive indulgences. One of them is that they are attached not to the pictures, statues, or reliefs, but to the WOODEN CROSSES placed over them. They must be canonically erected, that is according to the canons or regulations given by the Catholic Church, and by a priest specially privileged for the purpose. Franciscan priests are given a special grace for blessing them.

When praying the Stations, a priest is leading the congregation. It is enough that the priest himself proceeds from Station to Station. Each person should answer the prayers recited by the priest. This is the case where vocal prayers at all are necessary, for in all other cases it is required only a meditation on the Passion of Our Lord. It is not necessary to meditate on the particular station. At the end, it is usually prayed in reparation of the five wounds of our Lord, and it is said a “minor station” (one Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory) on behalf of the souls in the Purgatory, and for the intentions of the Sovereign Pontiff: the conversion of the Jews; the extirpation of the heresies; the exaltation of the Holy Church; the peace and concord among all Nations; and the conversions of all sinners.

Finally, the priest blesses with the sign of the Cross or, when possible, blessing with a relic of the Holy Cross of Our Lord. Doubtless, religion is not a spectacle to honor Christ Jesus. The liturgical ceremonies of the Catholic Church are adorned with the greatness songs of adoration, devotion, and the unction due to Almighty God. However, we must perform them accurately and reverently, and with the spirit of Jesus Christ, so that we can show in our daily life the effects of such intimate union with Him.

In addition, in carrying the Palms, we today profess ourselves ready to manifest Christ Our Lord to the world and ready to lay down our life as did the martyrs, at least by means of our good works and our daily struggle against His enemies. For there can be no true love in a heart which is not humble. Where there is no true abnegation, there can be no love for God nor love for the neighbor. We have to die in order to live, as a seed does for a plant, flower, or tree.

So, the palms are blessed so that those who carry them with adoration, or keep them in their houses, may receive protection of soul and body, by means of prayers of the Catholic Church, in order to adorn our souls with good works during the spiritual journey to meet the Savior. With this attitude, we may conquer the kingdom of death and darkness, and be made worthy to share in His glorious Resurrection and triumphant entrance into heaven.

As Saint Augustine writes of the Psalms: *"They are the emblem of praise, and sign of victory, because the Lord by death conquered death, and with the sign of victory, the cross, overcame the devil, the prince of this world."* Thus, preceded by the cross, we go in procession around the church singing hymns of praising. When we come to the church door, we find it locked, then the priest knocks at it with the cross. Heaven was closed to us by the sin of Adam, and it is opened to us by reconciliation through Our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross.

We should accordingly take part in the procession carrying the blessed palms to indicate that Jesus Christ - the conqueror of death, hell, and the devil- would reconcile repented sinners with God, and open the heavenly Jerusalem for us because the palm is the sign of victory and peace.

Let's take care at heart the words of the Messiah, which contain a fundamental truth in the present economy of salvation, frequently forgotten or put on one side by Christians. **Yet we have to repeat to ourselves, not only once but several times, that it is impossible to be saved unless we unite our sufferings with those of Christ.**

This is a wonderful antidote to cure a common ill of desiring vainglory on this life, which our common enemy makes sure to keep burning. The devil knows well that, once we are blinded by self-love, there is no need for him to do anything else.

More than ever, it is important to see how cunning is Satan. Because in spite of the fact we realize that sinful pleasures and materialist life are passing things, so frail and deceitful - almost nothing so to speak - he paints them in such glowing colors and represents them in a way to lose everything, even to despise our life and our very soul, together with all that God has promised us!

Certainly, there is blindness of us, who serve the world, with its passions and seductions. This is a thing worthy of pity to see how, even after the benefits of the Redemption, men are slaves to the world and how careful to keep in its standards.

There are many who have no control over themselves (no in the body, no in the soul) because they are afraid to lose the pleasures of this the world. Why after having been freed and redeemed by Christ, do we wish to become slaves once more to the tyrant and miserable world and the devil?

Let's beseech with a heart-felt prayer to Our Lord for His grace, particularly the grace of perseverance, so that with Him we may conquer the world, the flesh, and the devil, and in this way we may merit to be received into the heavenly Jerusalem.

Viva Cristo Rey!

Father Zendejas