

--- First a transition update before reflecting on Palm Sunday. My successor is now known, Fr. Deogratias Mbonyumugenzi who goes more simply by Fr. Deo, (pronounced “Day-O”). Fr. Deo is quite accomplished, he just completed his Doctorate in Systematic Theology at Loyola University while being an adjunct professor there. He speaks seven languages (including Spanish) and is currently the administrator at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Chicago.

Fr. Deo will likely be moving into the rectory in May and will help out at the parish until officially replacing me on July 1<sup>st</sup>. The staff is working on when to have a formal reception for him, probably in the Fall. Fr. Deo is originally from Rwanda and tells the story of the genocide there that he experienced as an eleven-year-old boy. You can read more about Fr. Deo in this newspaper article when talked to students at Eisenhower High School about reconciliation and peace: <https://www.chicagotribune.com/2019/01/31/blue-island-priest-who-survived-rwandan-genocide>

--- This week is Palm Sunday with our Gospel readings coming from St. Luke. St. Luke gives us some unique information about the Lord’s final days. We often focus on the various responses people at the time had to Jesus because it’s helpful for us in our discipleship to reflect on how we might have responded at the time. Would we have demanded like Judas that Jesus be a worldly king or protested how we would never deny or abandon Him like Peter? Would we have called Jesus a blasphemer like many of the religious leaders or been a secret believer like Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus? We’d probably all aspire to be like the Blessed Mother, St. John, Mary Magdalene and all the other faithful women who stuck with Jesus at the cross even without complete understanding.

The character study is a good and humbling reflection for us, but today, St. Luke also gives us some unique memories of how heroic and gracious Christ really was. Jesus, the Son of God, is the real hero of this week. He was true to His identity, faithful to the mission the Father gave Him but always present and concerned about those with Him, amazingly so. Jesus Christ took time to pray for, comfort, encourage, and forgive others *while* He went through His Passion.

At the Last Supper, Jesus specifically prayed for Peter, the first pope, ***“Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers.”*** The Lord knew about Peter’s weakness but also of his love and fidelity. When Peter denied Jesus, this Gospel reports that Jesus just gave Peter a look of love as the cock sounded, as gentle a correction as we could ask for.

Jesus also comforted the women on His own way to the cross. He took the time to encourage them to weep for themselves, not to worry about Him, the Divine heart always thinks of others. While on the cross, Jesus prayed ***“Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”*** The Lord knows about human ignorance, confusion, weakness, and sin, that’s why He came not to condemn but to forgive. For those we love, we try to find some reason why they failed, presuming that they have a good, not ill-will.

One of the most moving accounts only found in the Gospel of Luke, is that of the two thieves crucified next to Jesus one who mocks Him, the other who repents. This might be the most hopeful passage for those who have lived a life far from God but are sorry before the end. While we should never expect or wait for a deathbed confession (I have only heard a few as a priest) Jesus’ forgiveness of the good thief, while He himself is being crucified, gives us all extreme confidence in God’s mercy. The Lord never gives up on us, He doesn’t want us to give up on ourselves.

***“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”***

May we all have a blessed and prayerful Holy Week,

Fr. Mike

