



Psalm Sunday of the Lord's Passion (Year B): 27th/28th March 2021

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“No Greater Love”

One of the places most visited in Rome is the Scala Santa (The Holy Stairway) which is just across from the Lateran Basilica, the Cathedral Church of Rome. Those who go there on Pilgrimage ascend the 28 steps on their knees. It is said to have been brought there from Jerusalem by St Helena the mother of the Emperor Constantine. These are the steps Jesus walked before He was Crucified, the stairway of Pilate's House. It is a moving experience for the Pilgrims as they pray at each step of the way.

All over the world the Passion and Death of Jesus will be remembered in Holy Week, though it will be more low key this coming week due to the Pandemic. I think of the first Holy Week after ceasing to be a Parish Priest; I deliberately planned to go with my sister to join in the Holy Week ceremonies in Spain. It is an extraordinary spectacle: huge statues carried in Procession accompanied by sacred solemn music and thousands of people participating. I had studied Spanish for a year, and I was welcomed to concelebrate the ceremonies of the Triduum in the Cathedral at Malaga. This year my feet are on the ground again and I am assisting a Parish Priest here who has two Churches, taking the Triduum ceremonies at one of them. I look forward, the desire to experience the Spanish Ceremonies satisfied, to being part of the ceremonies here at home.

Wherever we are, this is the week of all weeks, the week when Jesus lived out those words “A man can have no greater love than to lay down His life for His friends” (John 15:31). It is clear in St Mark's Gospel, from which the Passion is read on Psalm Sunday this year, that Jesus knew that His death was pre-ordained and He accepted it in obedience to His Father's will. There are several references to the fulfilment of the Scriptures. Ferlita in his commentary says “Jesus whole life was to be a revelation of [the Father's] love. What better way to reveal it than to give Himself up on the Cross...The Cross on which Jesus hangs holds him up to our view and shows us how far love will go. Love goes through death and beyond.”

I am reminded of 27th March last year when Pope Francis took the Crucifix from the Church of St Marcellus in the Via del Corso in Rome to St Peter's as he prayed for an end to the Pandemic. You may remember the Crucifix stood there in the lobby of St Peter's as he prayed for and blessed all peoples. The message was clear, and I take it from the Acclamation before the Passion reading for the Sunday of the Passion: “Christ was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a Cross. But God raised Him high and gave Him the name which is above all names.” He is for us “the Way, the Truth, the Life”. The Palms we hold in exultation are a symbol of our belief in His triumph, and that as he says in St John's Gospel Chapter 14 “He will return to take us with Him”.

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