

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

The crucifixion of Jesus captivates us Catholics. We proclaim the Passion twice each year—Palm Sunday and Good Friday. We celebrate every Mass with a crucifix on or near the altar. Many of us wear an image of the cross of Christ. We believe in the resurrection, but there is no resurrection without the cross.

The cross immediately brings to mind the physical suffering of Jesus. When we undergo illness or injury, we take comfort that Christ, who became human, understands our infirmities.

Still, when we hear the Passion in Holy Week, we confront not only Jesus' physical suffering, but his emotional suffering as well. Mark's account mentions the crown of thorns but not the nails, and the blood in the cup at the Last Supper but not the blood streaming from the cross. Mark reports the emotional suffering, which the crucifix alone may not convey. In his account of Jesus' final day, Mark presents four of the twelve apostles by name: Peter, James, John and Judas. All of them fail him. The first three formed an inner circle, the same ones who witnessed the transfiguration, for example. But when Jesus brings them to Gethsemane to watch and wait with him, they fall asleep. Later, Peter denies him three times. The offense of Judas surely hurt the most. He accepted cash from the chief priests to hand Jesus over to them. Jesus identified Judas as the betrayer while they were sharing a sacred meal. In the garden, Judas called Jesus "Rabbi" and betrayed him with a kiss. At Mass, just before the consecration, you often hear the priest introduce the Last Supper not with a reference to the menu, the prayers, or the friendship, but to the emotional suffering: It took place on the night Jesus was betrayed.

We may connect with the Passion of Christ either way: physically or emotionally. If you have not suffered illness or injury, you may have suffered betrayal by someone you loved, someone you thought was among those closest to you, someone who ate with you, someone who prayed with you, someone you brought to a garden, someone who kissed you. On this Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord, we take heart from this knowledge. When we are unjustly betrayed, we may not get justice, but we can find peace from the truth. There is someone who understands betrayal. We see his image in every cross. He is Lord and Christ.