

Palm Sunday 2023 “*Eli Eli lema sabachthani*”

Bishop Frank Schuster

We have begun! My friends, we have entered Holy Week. The Passion preaches for itself. We have entered the drama of our salvation.

There is so much here to reflect on. For many, Jesus’ last words on the cross in Matthew’s gospel can at times hit very close to the mark, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani*”. My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? These last words from Jesus on the cross are from psalm 22. You may wish to pick up a bible this week and prayerfully read it, because in this psalm contains Jesus’ understanding of why his death on the cross was salvific for humanity. The last part of psalm 22 is quite revealing. Towards the end the psalmist says, “All the ends of the earth will worship and turn to the Lord...All who sleep in the earth will bow low before God; all who have gone down in the dust will kneel in homage.”

This piece is revealing because, on the cross, Jesus entered the very heart of what it feels like to be godforsaken, what it feels like to succumb to sin and death itself, so to truly become for us the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Let’s hear the psalmist again, “All who sleep in the earth will bow low before God; all who have gone down in the dust will kneel in homage”. That is God’s agenda.

My friends, Jesus’ last words on the cross also invite us to truthfully acknowledge the areas of our lives that just simply feels godforsaken right now, that simply feels broken. When were those times when we just felt like we betrayed Jesus maybe for a handful of silver, whatever that metaphor means? When were the times when we felt spiritually asleep, unaware at how much we took the Lord for granted until he was taken away from us? When were the times that we exchanged charity for violence toward those around us, in our thoughts perhaps, in our words or even actions? For me, the image of a disciple cutting off someone’s ear in our Gospel reading is so provocative because when we resort to violent thoughts, words and deeds the first thing that goes is the ability to hear, to listen.

You see, now more than ever we recognize that there is an inherent dysfunction at the core of our being, a place where we sometimes feel even godforsaken. Jesus’ last words on the cross are evidence that Jesus truly understands how we feel in those moments. If we ever feel like we are falling from the Father to hell itself, Jesus now stands in between. What this means is, hell itself cannot stand in the way of God’s love for you. That is what the cross says. The cross is God yelling out, I love you. I will go to hell and back for you. And I will never abandon you.

My friends, we have now entered Holy Week. I highly encourage us to enter this story by making Holy Week a retreat experience for you, your friends, and your family. Enter this sacred story by celebrating the Holy Triduum with us at St. Vincent de Paul. The Holy Triduum begins with Holy Thursday at 7 PM this Thursday Evening, followed by Good Friday at 7 PM Friday Evening. The Triduum concludes with Easter Vigil at 8:30 PM this Saturday night. We will also have a reflection service at noon on Good Friday with Stations of the Cross at 3. I invite you to

make Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Vigil a retreat experience for you and your family so to stay awake with Jesus during Holy Week.

And so, let's ask ourselves again, when was that time in life when we felt the most godforsaken? When was that time when you felt like you were in the dark valley of the shadow of death? When was that time when you felt alone and abandoned, hungering for love and new life? My friend, this week is your week to journey with Jesus! Experience the depth of God's love for you, that can take you from even a feeling of godforsakenness into a personal friendship with God himself.