**Palm Sunday of Holy Week – Cycle C: Like 22: 14-71 & 23: 1-56**

**Spiritual Reflection**: In reflecting on the gospel reading, our saint instructs us that, “It is at the foot of the cross that we should remain always. It is the place where the imitators of our Sovereign Maser and Savior ordinarily abide…” In the Passion sequence of Luke’s gospel, the persons we are made aware of “at the foot of the cross”, were “the people” watching Him, “the rulers” scoff[ing], and “the soldiers” mocking Him and earlier stripping Him of his clothes and the “Centurion” and “the Women” who followed him from Galilee and “His acquaintances”, which from the other gospels we can assume include the Blessed Mother, St. John the Evangelist and other followers of Christ. Our author emphasizes the folly of cross (giving reference to 1 Cor 1: 18 & 23) in that it “requires that we endure labors, persecutions and reprehensions for justice’s sake” – “wisdom contrary to that of the world.”

It is interesting that even the persons who would mock him (soldiers who are like “dead men at his rising), scoff him (bribe guards to lie about the truth), or even the least like to profess him as “righteous or innocent” and the Son of God (the Centurion) or even the unwitting Pilate, (writing “INRI, Jesus , King of the Jews”) and the rulers (chief priests and the elders) would all be made the fools for doubting Jesus is the Son of God, the “I AM”.

* Believers, repentant (Peter), converts, and deniers all end up at the foot of the cross. What remains is how often or ordinarily will we “abide” there. How will you come to be there? Do you want to be there? Why or why not?
* How and how often do you want to be at the foot of the Cross? God’s way or your way? Exteriorly only? Interiorly only and too afraid of the opinions of the world – persecution, ridicule, mockery for your foolishness? Or completely and often? Just a little while? Later or sooner than later? What does it mean to you to be completely and often at the foot of the cross?
* “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do”. Even as a crime of arguable ignorance and demonstrable violence is carried out against their Creator, Jesus intercedes for them who are driving stakes into his flesh. Do you believe that you have culpability in the Crucifixion? What nails of sin has or will Christ take for you? Are you willing to convert your heart, admit your guilt and forgive yourself as your Father forgave you? Is it just not too—to not imitate Christ?
* What does judgement (righteous justice of the All Good God) look like to you? What is willful ignorance and how is it related to the deadly sin of slothfulness? Is it just that those who have committed great sins against Creator and Son of God are forgiven simply for the sake of ignorance? Why or why not? If perfect knowledge is not expected of us, then what is expected?

* How does mercy play into justice? Are you willing to forgive people who offend or wrong you? Do you or should you hold Christians to a higher standard than non-Christians for trespasses? Why or why not?

**Thursday in the Fifth Week of Lent: John 8: 51-59**

**Biblical Reflection**: Our gospel reading brings us in half way through a testy exchange with Jews “who had believed in Him” [John 8:31] as he tries to call them back. The exchange is in reference to Abrahamic lineage and true covenantal knowing, *yadah*, (introduced last week) of God. Our Lord speaks plainly and very directly telling them, “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires… a murder… because here is no truth in him… speaks according to his own nature… the father of lies,” [John 8: 44] directly rebuking the Jew’s claim that Abraham is their father. The Jews then accuse Jesus of being a demon (tit for tat). Jesus, instead of escalating, immediately he offers them the directions to the road of salvation, telling them, “whoever keeps my word will never see death,” thus is inferring his Sonship and Oneness with the Father, which the Jews were denying (revealing their ignorance and unwillingness to believe, to *yadah* God). Jesus later tells them, “He is our God. You do not know him, but I know him.” And again, “I know him and keep his word. Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day,” thinking as men do in linear time and space, the Jews didn’t understand how a man under fifty could know a Patriarch of the faith from 2000 B.C. Jesus doesn’t flinch now clearly stating, “…before Abraham came to be, I AM,” proclaiming that he was God.

When “the Jews who had believed in him”, proclaimed that their father was of Abrahamic descent, Jesus directs them to the story of Abraham, and of Isaac and Ishmael. Both were natural sons of Abraham, but only Isaac was the lawfully conceived. Ishmael was the product of Sarah’s and Abraham’s disbelief (and to a lesser extent, the Egyptian slave, Hagar’s) in God’s Word that Sarah would conceive in her old age. Ishmael and Hagar are sent away and disinherited out of Sarah’s jealousy, but God has a plan. Jesus is warning the Jews that sin is what separates us from God and that natural lineage guarantees nothing. Jesus offers them *yadah* with God, the release from sin, his plan, if they are willing to hear it, the path of salvation.

* Jesus is speaking for former followers—those who have rejected part of Jesus’ teaching—that he is I AM. They recline at the table of Abraham, so they believe, but in reality at the table of their father, the murder, the liar, the devil. Do you see lapsed Catholics or Protestants or other non-Christian faiths with this kind of clarity? Why or why not? Is it OK to pick and choose the parts of faith that we can accept and reject the parts we don’t? Why?
* Are you willing, as God has called you, to invite them into the path of salvation? Should we take the same approach with non-Christians as we do with lapsed Catholics? Why or why not? What would your approach be to each of these groups should you be blessed to encounter them?
* Is it fair and just that Hagar and Ishmael are disinherited for the disobedience of Abraham and Sarah? God tells Abraham to listen to his jealous wife, Sarah, and to send both Hagar and his son Ishmael, into the desert, with a promise that God will make of Ishmael a great nation and provide for him (Gen 21: 12-13). That fulfillment comes in Gen 21: 18-19. What does this tell you about unbelief, God’s mercy, righteousness and culpability for the consequences of sin?
* Have you felt the pain of your own sin reflected in the lives of the innocent(s) who surround you? Do you believe that God permits the consequences of unbelief and sin to affect you through consequences cast upon others in your lives? Why would God permit this? Do you think affects upon innocents have a greater or lesser impact upon you? Would you be more or less likely to “return to God with all your heart” if you knew that innocents would be impacted by your hardness of heart?
* CCC 530 explains that, “The *flight into Egypt* and the massacre of the innocents make manifest the opposition of darkness to the light…” Given the apparently unprovoked Russian attack on Ukraine and the immense suffering of the innocents of this war and every other war in history, do you believe that God permits this horror to unfold for some good? What light do you think that could be? How would the suffering of innocents change us or bring us closer to God?