

Palm Sunday C Keep Your Eyes on Jesus

Introduction...

Today we begin the most sacred of seasons, the very heart of the Jesus' story... Holy Week. During Holy Week we make a special effort to "keep our eyes on Jesus" as Paul the Apostle encourages Christians in his letter to the Hebrews, chapter 13...

Refrain... Keep Your Eyes on Jesus

Today we have read the Passion Story from the Gospel of Luke (B: Mark)... the Gospel for this Church year.
Why did Jesus have to be crucified?
Is our God so vengeful that God's own son had to suffer?

Jesus came to reveal God... He who sees me sees the Father. (Jn)

Jesus also came to show us God's way...
To heal a broken humanity,
and to reveal God's dream for us...
what it means to live a fully human life.

Christ's mission was to preach and teach and heal.
How does the Cross fit into that?
Why the Cross?

Refrain... Keep Your Eyes on Jesus

I Sin

We first need to look into the reality of *sin* – a topic not too readily understood today. Do we even recognize our sinfulness?

Today we no longer talk about sin?
Sin has become a meaningless word.
Right and wrong have become very slippery.
We have become gods unto ourselves,
calling our own shots,

rationalizing and giving ourselves excuses –
not even realizing how we hurt each other,
or worse... not caring.

What is sin?

How does the Cross of Jesus address the reality of sin?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church in # 387 tells us that the reality of sin can be understood in the context of our Holy Scriptures.

What do our Sacred Scriptures tell us about sin?

What are our sacred stories?

When the Jewish people of the Old Testament looked at how broken their world was,

how much violence and pain and suffering people caused each other, they asked how a loving creator God could have allowed this.

They told the story of our world and our first parents created lovingly by God and placed in a beautiful Garden, and given charge of the Garden and the animals.

God also gave them freedom – they were not automatons.

God made them to love God, and to love each other, and to love this world... of their own free will.

God gave them only one commandment... don't eat of *that* tree.

I don't know about you, but if my mother said, "Don't do that,"

I wondered why.

Don't put your hand on that hot stove.

Don't play with matches.

Don't throw stones at other children.

Hmm... what will happen if I put my hand on that stove?

Hmm... matches, fire, burning... wow!

I don't want to tell you what happened when I threw stones at other kids.

So God said to Adam and Eve, don't eat the fruit of *that* tree.

And the serpent said,

"Go ahead, don't worry, you'll be just like God if you eat that fruit."

They ate that fruit.

They decided that they wanted to do it their way, not God's way.

They decided that they know better than God.

And sin entered our world.

The story of sin begins in the Garden of Eden, and continues on.

Cain killed Abel out of envy and anger and resentment toward Abel.
How much violence is done today out of envy and anger and resentment?

Noah lived in a world given over to evil deeds and violence.
How much of our world is given over to evil deeds and violence.

Senseless killings and violence appear in our daily Newspapers.
Do we hurt people thru our own gossiping and spreading rumors,
by demeaning and demonizing people we don't like...
so much verbal violence?

Israel, newly delivered from slavery in Egypt, decided to worship a calf made
of gold.
How we suffer today because of so much envy, greed and arrogance offered
at the altar of money.

God didn't make us to be happy or successful.
God made us to love.
Sin injures love.

God sent his prophets to remind his people to take care of the widow and
the orphan and the poor.
Do we begrudge taking care of the marginalized in our society...
the elderly, children and persons with handicaps... t
oo often blaming them for their poverty?

The Hebrew writers told the stories of how the sin of our first parents and
our descendents had polluted their world,
and brought suffering and violence to so many.

Is our world any better?

This is what our sacred books describe for us...
the stories of sin in our world.
Fairy tales?
Or descriptions of sin and the powers of evil which still seem to hold our
world in their grip today?

Refrain... Keep Your Eyes on Jesus

II God and Sin

What is God's reaction to the sin of God's creation?

God doesn't abandon our world,

because he loves us, we are God's precious creation.

But there is now a gulf between God and our sinful world?

Our all holy God cannot abide sin and evil.

Men and women had created a gulf, a divide, between our all holy God and God's creation?

How bridge this divide?

(Your sins and my sins cause a rift between God and us?)

Our world is broken.

Do we even recognize our sinfulness?)

How sins offend God!

Our broken world offends God!

And our broken world hurts us and others!

But loving God doesn't give up on our broken world.

God will not let us remain in darkness and sin, unless we choose to.

God sends his beloved Son to bring us back to God,

to show us the way, the truth and the life.

That was the message of Jesus. "Repent and believe in the Good News."

And look what happened to Jesus.

They/we hung him on a tree...

The innocent one.

The peaceful one.

The loving one.

The compassionate one.

Jesus took the sins of the world onto that tree with him...

The envy,

the anger and rage,

the resentments,

the hatred and revenge,

the violence.

the cowardice and self-centeredness and self will run riot.

Only Jesus could bridge the gulf,
the chasm between our sinful humanity and our loving creator,
because Jesus was both human and divine.
Jesus took our place on the Cross...
to save us from our sinfulness...

Only Jesus' love and forgiveness of the sin that he bore on his Cross could
save us,
could make us right again before God,
could redeem us from the slavery of sin,
could reconcile us and bring us back into God's family.

Refrain... Keep Your Eyes on Jesus

Conclusion...

What does this mean to us?
How does all of this affect us?

There's a beautiful story told about a statue of Jesus in a French village
following the expulsion of the Nazi army...

*During the Second World War after the D Day invasion of France the
American soldiers liberated a small French village on their way through
France. After the fighting the villagers came out into the village square to
discover that the fighting had scarred their beautiful life sized statue of
Jesus. It was covered with dirt, and had several bullet holes, along with
other scratches. Worst of all, both of the hands of Christ had been blown
off.*

Some of the villagers suggested that they get a new statue.

*Others suggested that they clean up the statue, but leave the bullet holes
and the scars as a reminder of their blessed liberation. But they wanted to
get a sculptor to make two new hands for the statue.*

*A third group suggested they clean up the statue and keep it as a reminder,
but that they put no new hands on the statue.*

*To this day the life sized, scarred statue of Jesus stands in the village square,
with no hands. Below it is a plaque, which reads,
"We are the hands of Christ."*

We now carry on the mission of Christ...

In the midst of this Holy Week keep your eyes on Jesus.
See Jesus' love for each one of us.

Then realize that as his disciples we are to carry on his mission – who else will do that?

In this Eucharist invite Jesus into your life and into your heart.
Ask Jesus for the strength and courage to carry on his mission and bring light into the darkness, forgiveness into the hatred and resentment, faith into doubt...
Tell Jesus you love him...

(There's a beautiful traditional prayer I'd like to end with...
A Prayer at the foot of the Cross...

Loving Jesus,
compassionate and caring,
for how many ages have you hung upon your cross,
and still we pass you by and regard you not,
except to pierce anew your sacred heart?
How often have I passed you by,
headless of your great sorrow, your many wounds, your infinite love?
How often have I stood before you,
not to comfort and console you,
but to add to your sorrows, to deep your wounds, to scorn your love?
You have stretched forth your hands to help me,
and I have taken those hands and nailed them back onto the cross,
rigid and helpless.
But I have only succeeded in engraving my name on your palms forever.
Loving Jesus, let your blood be upon me,
not for a curse, but for a blessing.)