

We *are* in unusual *times*, aren't we?! Usually, on Palm Sunday, the church would be *swelling* with folks in *addition* To the regular *ranks*.

Y'know, our old friends -- the *CAPE Catholics*! They're a little more advanced than the *Creaesters* who come on just Christmas and Easter. They're the ones who -- hopefully in *addition* to receiving Jesus in the Eucharist -- They enjoy the *door* prize of Ashes on Ash Wednesday, And Palms on Palm Sunday! Hence, the *CAPE Catholics* -- Christmas, Ashes, Palms, and Easter.

I'm missing *all* of them this year. [sincerely!] And of course, I'm missing the gathering of the faithful in the pews. It's *strange* to preach to an empty church. But I take heart from the image of Pope Francis -- Giving a special *Urbi et Orbi* Address to an *empty* St. Peter's square. *Urbi et Orbi* is an address the pope gives to the city of Rome as its Bishop, And to the *world*, as our Holy Father. He *gives* it on just *three* occasions.

*First*, when he's first named pope. And then, every year at Christmas and Easter. But *this* year, he just gave us an unprecedented address early during Passiontide -- on March 27. He *reminds* us to *trust* in Christ's presence in our struggles. ... That *faith* is not just about believing God exists -- But that God has come to save us; That no matter what illness, war, or oppression may befall us, Christ is *already* with us. Do we *believe* that?

Here we are at the end of Lent, and the beginning of the holiest week of the year in the church calendar. It's Palm Sunday, and I have no worshippers in the pews. The Physical Body of Christ is hard to see without you. And for you,

I have no palms to offer, due to the COVID-19 health precautions. And *more* heart-breaking, you cannot come to join in the Mass, and above all, the Eucharist. Yet, the Good News remains true: Christ *is* with us! We may not have palms to wave, but we can still proclaim:

*Hosanna in the highest!*

*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!*

*Hosanna in the highest!*

*Hosanna* originally translated from Hebrew meaning: *Please save us LORD!* -- it was a *plea for God's help*. Jesus entered the city of God -- Jerusalem -- as that savior -- the *Messiah* -- the *Christ*. And the people *rejoiced* that God has *heard* their cry and sent Jesus: God Saves! This *pleading cry* has been transformed into a shout for *joy and praise*. *Our Savior has come*.

Are we *trusting* in that as we sit in social isolation? ... *longing* for the Blessed Sacrament? As Pope Francis said, I *urge* you to have *faith* -- *trust* that Jesus is *with* us. In the same boat, on the stormy sea of our lives, The Church is that boat. Making its journey through the struggles of this world, And striving to get to the other side -- eternal rest and communion with God. We're like the apostles who freak out as the storm overtakes the boat, and Jesus is *asleep*.

But He *sleeps* because He *trusts* in our heavenly Father to see us through the storm. And so He wakes to calm that storm, *not* because it was a threat to our well-being. But because it

stirred a storm in our *hearts*. Some *doubt* in God's care for us. And *that's* the storm He seeks to save us from.

Today is not just *Palm* Sunday, but also *Passion* Sunday. We just *heard* the lengthy Passion of Christ. It shows the darker side of a humanity chained to sin. It shows the raging storm of sin that works to keep us in its grip: Responding to the presence of Christ in fear, doubt, hatred, anger, cynicism, Mockery, Apathy, indifference, betrayal, lies, desertion, Cowardice, accusation, abuse of power, violence, and self-destruction. Yet in *all* that, Christ stays true to God, and true to us. He comes in the name of the Lord to *save* us. That doesn't mean we don't *follow* Him. We aren't necessarily spared struggles, burdens, trials, and tragedies in our lives. It's hard to lift our heads out of that storm of sin to see the true reality: That Christ is *with us* -- in the boat. And He wants to be with us, in the storms of our hearts. To *lift* us up. But in being lifted into communion with the risen Christ, We are *first* lifted up in His *Cross*.

But in *having faith* -- *trusting* Jesus to be with us and to save us -- We have our rock and our refuge in the midst of those storms. We *have* our peace in Christ. A peace that is *not* the absence of struggle, But the presence of *Christ in* that struggle.

My friends, I daresay this may be the *holiest* Holy Week of our lives so *far*. The week is *not* holy because we have grand gatherings with lots of rich and beautiful pageantry in our rituals. They *are* beautiful and special. [and I *miss* them!] And we *are* deprived of them this year. And of *each other* in the same physical space. But what makes it most Holy is our hearts' keen and *poignant longing* for Christ's presence. What's the beatitude of all beatitudes that He taught us: *Blessed are the poor in spirit*. Well, we are truly blessed *now* then! For our spirits *feel* that longing for the sacraments and for communion with Christ's Body. Is our response to rail against God? To *accuse* God like the frightened Apostles who said: "Do you not *care* for us -- asleep in the boat."

No! If we *do* then *we* are the ones sleeping! For God is *with* us in this boat. In fact, He's at the *helm!* *Have Faith! Trust!* This fallow field, stripped of the fruits of the sacraments for a season, Will bear all the *more* fruit once this storm has passed.

I and all priests serving as shepherds will *continue* to pray the Mass for Christ's Body. He's *here* in the Boat. Are *we*? *Let's open our hearts to Him*. And truly we can *sing out*: Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!