

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Palm Sunday 2020 will always be in our memories. Instead of the buzz of the gathering congregation on Palm Sunday morning, families will find themselves at home tuning in on Masses through *livestream* on their TV screens, computers, or smart phones. Instead of the usual delightful joy of children excitedly holding their palms, Palm Sunday this year will be dull and boring. Instead of the sounds of 'hosanna' filling our churches, today there is only silence. At the same time, a type of '*suffering*' fills our hearts that is almost indescribable. When words fail us the Word of God always provides us with the right words:

*By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.
There on the willows we hung our harps, for there our captors requested a song;
our tormentors demanded songs of joy:
"Sing us a song of Zion."
How can we sing a song of the LORD in a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand cease to function.
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you,
if I do not exalt Jerusalem as my greatest joy!
(Psalm 137)*

Covid-19 has restricted us in many ways. We find ourselves in a kind of '*foreign land*.' None of us could have imagined that such a medical/health crisis affect could our catholic way of life in our homes, parishes, schools and workplaces in the way it has.

*How can we sing a song of the Lord in a foreign land?
How can we sing "Hosanna to the Son of David" in this 'existence'- being restricted-being confined?*

These current times can help us appreciate how essential *Public (Communal) Prayer and Personal Prayer* are in our lives as Christians. Yes while our current situation restricts us from gathering together for *Public Prayer* it has however also given us the *time and space* to deepen our *Personal Prayer* and nurture *Family Prayer* at home.

The roots of a gum tree find its way in the *silence and darkness* of the soil in which it burrows to find water and nutrients necessary for its life. While the roots do not see the beauty of the tree above, it continues to dig deep into the earth for *growth, strength and stability*. While remaining unseen, the fruit of its hidden work is visible on the tree above. Such is the nature of *Personal Prayer*. The Church and the world depend on it!

While our sadness is real and our longing for the Mass and the Eucharist heartfelt like the Israelites longing for Jerusalem, these difficult times can also be opportunities for *honest reflection and personal conversion too*.

Am I sad only because I cannot go to Mass and receive the Eucharist? or Am I sad because it was to save us from our sins that Jesus had to suffer and die? Am I sad because of my sins that Jesus suffered and died? What can I do to change and be better? (For reflection <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7f9bzXG2BF0>)

While we cannot gather together to celebrate Jesus' triumphant into Jerusalem, perhaps we can still acclaim Jesus our Saviour during our *Personal and Family Prayer by saying 3 times "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."* Let us welcome *him into the solitude of our hearts and into our homes*. Let us ask him to leave his foot prints in there so that we may confidently put our frail feet into them as we go forward into the *silence and darkness* of Holy Week, following him and truly live.

May you have a safe and blessed Holy Week.

In Christ,
Fr Epeli