

**Homily for Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord – Year A
March 29, 2026**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The liturgy today is rather different from that of other Sundays. Already you will have noticed this when, at the beginning of Mass, we gathered in the Atrium and a Gospel passage was read, telling of how the crowds welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem as they sang, “Hosanna to the Son of David”; and then we all processed with blessed palms, singing like them. Another major difference that we have just heard is the reading of the full account of Jesus’ passion in the Gospel. Depending on the year, the passion of Matthew, Mark or Luke is read on Palm Sunday. This year it’s Matthew’s turn, as it is every three years.

The four Gospels describe the passion of Christ in different ways, to emphasize different aspects of the event. For Mark, one of the central factors is the refusal of Jesus to be the kind of Messiah the crowd thought He should be. For Luke, the emphasis is on the mercy of Christ; we have

the women who weep for Christ, and the good thief who repents on the cross. For John, whose account of the Lord's Passion we hear every year on Good Friday, it is the unbroken love between the Father and the Son, which is not obscured but revealed by his passion.

Matthew, whose description of Jesus' passion we read today, takes a different approach. It is helpful to note that the whole Gospel of Matthew is written as a continuous sequence, with Jesus preaching to the Jews first at the Sermon of the Mount and, after his own people have rejected His mission, leading to the resounding command at the end of the Gospel to "Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time." Of all the Gospels, Matthew is the one that most needs to be read from beginning to end, to be properly understood. So the Magi in the infancy narrative show that ultimately the mission of Christ is for all the world, not just the Jews.

Apart from the length of today's Gospel, there is something quite different happening in this Gospel from what was happening in the first Gospel reading that we heard before the procession. The tone has changed

starkly and dramatically. We have moved, as it were, from being witnesses of people in the crowd happily singing and rejoicing, to now being witnesses of every detail of injustice and cruelty and torture inflicted on Jesus just a few days later. As we begin our celebrations of Holy Week, we are invited not just to watch like a spectator at a biblical movie epic, but to participate actively and identify with each of the characters, seeing our part that we play in these events.

In all four Gospels the Passion of our Lord is the story of God's healing love for the broken hearts of a fallen world. Love is God's great gift to us. Without love, there is no peace, there is no friendship, there is no family. Without love, there is no redemption. Without love, there is no salvation.

We heard in Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians "Though he was in the form of God He did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at." The Son of God came down to us and humbled Himself by being hungry and thirsty. He is human in every way but sin, even to the point of death, death on the cross.

During this last week of Lent, otherwise known as Holy Week, we see Jesus preparing Himself, and His Disciples, for His death. This

upcoming week is the most important week in the liturgical year. Holy Thursday, we witness the institution of the Eucharist and the ministerial priesthood, where the Body and Blood of Christ were first given to us at the Last Supper. That night after Mass we adore Him in that precious Host.

Good Friday, we again hear the about greatest sacrifice in history, the passion and death of Our Lord. We go up to the most precious cross and reverence it with a kiss. The altars are stripped bare as we wait for the resurrection of Christ.

Then on Saturday night we have the Vigil of Easter, where the light of Christ comes into the world, where we welcome and rejoice with those who receive the Sacraments of Initiation as new members of the Catholic Church.

I strongly encourage you to attend all the liturgical services of the Triduum: the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday at 6:30 PM, the Good Friday Liturgy at 3:00 PM, and the Easter Vigil on Saturday night at 8 o'clock. Taking part in the Paschal Triduum gives us a greater appreciation for the mysteries of our faith and the depth of God's love that we celebrate each time we take part in the Eucharist.

May God give us this grace. Amen.