

Homily based on the readings from April 13, 2025 (Luke 19.28-40; Isaiah 50.4-7; Philippians 2.6-11; Luke 22.14–23.56)

There is so much material in today's readings that it is difficult to know what to talk about. There is one key idea, though, that relates to *everything* we just heard: from his own perspective, Jesus did not *need* to do any of this. He did not *need* to let himself be betrayed by his own people and his closest followers. He did not *need* to submit himself to the worldly authority of the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate. He did not *need* to endure the mockery of the Roman soldiers, or the scourging at the pillar, or the crowning with thorns. He did not *need* to stumble under the weight of the instrument of his own execution. He did not *need* to die on the Cross for our salvation. With nothing more than a word, he could have *ended* this whole ordeal. As he remarked in Saint Matthew's account of the Passion: "Do you think that I cannot call upon my Father and he will not provide me at this moment with more than twelve legions of angels?" (26.53). Faced with unimaginable pain and suffering, he could simply have walked away.

This same principle applies not only to the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, but to every aspect of his earthly existence. In fact, he never *needed* to become a human being in the first place. Christ's life did not begin with the Annunciation, when his human body was conceived in the womb of his Blessed Mother. He had existed since *before* the beginning of time, coeternal and consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* Becoming human was not a promotion for him, but an unbelievable act of self-degradation. As we just heard from Saint Paul: "he *emptied* himself, taking the form of a *slave*, coming in *human* likeness." Taken on its own terms, Christ's incarnation was the most incredible act of humility in the history of the *universe*. It is utterly *astonishing* that God deigned to become a man, let alone that he was willing to die the death of a common criminal.

When confronted with these facts, the obvious response on our part is *why?* Why would Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, take

human flesh in the first place – let alone suffer torment and death? The answer to this question, in its totality, lies beyond the bounds of our mortal comprehension – but there are at least two concrete actions that we can hope to imitate. The first is Christ's *obedience*. Remember his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane:

Father, if you are willing,
take this cup away from me;
still, not my will but yours be done.

We may not fully understand the sacrifice that Christ was asked to make – or even the much *smaller* sacrifices that are expected from each of us – but we can still follow his example, surrendering ourselves to the will of our Heavenly Father.

The second action, of course, is love – not an emotion, not a feeling, but the life-altering *decision* to set aside our own good for the welfare of others. This love, which is described in Greek by the word *ἀγάπη*, was fully and perfectly embodied by the event that we just heard proclaimed:

the Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ. No human being on *earth* can ever hope to match the love demonstrated by Christ on the Cross – but it serves as the *example* toward which we strive, the *ideal* upon which we base our lives. As we prepare in a few moments to partake in Christ's sacrificial banquet, let us remember that we are not just sharing in his Body and Blood, but in his *willing* suffering and death – and also, by the grace of God, in his triumphant Resurrection.