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Homily at Mass Palm/Passion Sunday, Year C – 14 April 2019

The story of Our Lord's suffering and death is filled with people – all the people we see depicted in the 14 Stations of the Cross on the Church walls. Amongst them we find key players like Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, as well as King Herod, and anonymous groups like the chief priests, the soldiers, the crowd. But St Luke is also careful to include individuals like Simon of Cyrene who helped Jesus carry the cross to Calvary, the women of Jerusalem and their children and at the Cross the Good Thief and the friends of Jesus. Only St John tells us that Our Lady stood beneath her son's cross. And other Gospel writers list the names of the holy women who were there as well – Mary Magdalene, and several others.

It seems that many Australians will take advantage of school holidays and a welter of public holidays including ANZAC Day to perhaps head interstate or overseas for a break. But we can be certain that a great many more will observe these days with the reverence they deserve. Today we enter Holy Week. We have our palm branch – a sign of the palms and cheers that greeted Our Lord on this day when he entered through the gates of Jerusalem to fulfil his mission from the Father – to embrace the Cross, to die for us, to rise in glory on Easter Day.

Four major readings from the Bible today teach us so much about the meaning of the Cross and Our Lord's saving mission – “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.” Jesus is God's son sent by the Father. “Peace in heaven” recalls the song of the angels at Bethlehem, the same song we sing with joy each Sunday: “Glory to God in the highest and peace to God's people on earth.” Jesus comes to us at Christmas, he enters Jerusalem today on a mission of peace – to restore peace and friendship between God our Creator and sinful humanity. When we look at the Cross – and Jesus stretched out on it – we see that it points in 4 directions: north, south, east, west. His arms outstretched on the Cross, Jesus bids us, draws us, welcomes us – “Come to me,” Come to my Father, find a home in my arms and in my heart.

Our Catholic religion offer us rich resources in our celebration of Holy Week. Palm branches on Palm Sunday. Fasting and abstinence on Good Friday. Silence. Sacred Scripture especially the stories of Our Lord's suffering, Cross, burial in each of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary. The Stations of the Cross. But more than anything else the liturgy we celebrate on Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

All of these things touch us deeply, personally. We think over and over again, helped by the insights of St Paul: “Christ died for us while we were still sinners”; “Christ loved me and gave himself up for me”. We also contemplate the mysteries of these days and all that Jesus did to establish his Church – the gift of the priesthood he conferred on his apostles; the gift of the Eucharist he instituted at the Last Supper; the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the

forgiveness of sins and he gained for us by his Cross and Resurrection. The Sacrament of Baptism that poured out in the water and blood from his open side on the Cross.

Holy Week stands at the centre of our Christian life. With faith, joy, humility, gratitude and praise let us give ourselves whole heartedly to the celebration of Holy Week and the victory of Christ's Easter.