**Mark 15 (1-47)**

**“Suffering With Royalty”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. We may not live in a monarchy system as in days of old. However, everyone still knows how to treat royalty when we see it. It can be by birth as with the Queen of England who still gets to walk on a red carpet wearing her crown. It can be by majority vote as with our president who steps off Air Force One surrounded by security. It can be by popularity as with a celebrity who enters a room filled with fans shouting their name. This is the kind of royalty felt on that first Palm Sunday with Jesus. They praised His Name, worshiped His works, and honored His right to be King of the Jews. Of course, Palm Sunday before the cross was a procession before a very different kind of royalty.

If nobody else could say it, God used a donkey to confess the good news. It is as Zechariah the prophet proclaimed, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey…” Passion Week is the pinnacle celebration of the Christian Church. If you want a religion of advice, Judaism can teach you to fulfill all righteousness by the Law. If you want a religion of power, Islam seems credible considering the determination of its followers. If you want a religion patterned to the individual, Eastern religions can be very self-satisfying. Christianity stands out among all others with the suffering and death of God’s Son for a sinful world. The royalty of Jesus Christ is to make us subjects to His kingdom of the cross.

As sinful human beings, we naturally stand in a defensive position. To face accusation demands an answer that ends up being just as accusing. Maybe it is to turn the tables on my wife to hurt her feelings. Maybe it is to dig up old dirt on my husband to overwhelm with him guilt. Maybe it is to lie just in order to still look good in front of my friends. Maybe it is not to say anything because it will only prove me even more at fault. Jesus did none of this as the Savior. His trial was to suffer self-righteous sinners. We heard, “And the chief priests accused him of many things. And Pilate again asked him, ‘Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.’ But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.”

Here is a royalty that speaks the truth in silence. Jesus could have made a defense as the sinless Son of God. Yet, His task was not to save Himself, but to suffer the accusation of sinners. As Isaiah said, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). We want to self-justify our actions, glorify our ways, and yet God seems silent. All this ends up falling upon Jesus and His kingdom of the cross. As one early church father puts it, “He kept silent so that his silence would make them shout even louder, and so that his crown would be made more beautiful through all this clamor” (ACC 212). Jesus bears with the accusation to subject us to His righteousness given for sinners.

In a society that seeks rightly to stop suffering, we also tend to go the other way and avoid it. There are plenty of ways to make things appear good even when they are evil. Rather than killing babies, we call it a woman’s choice. Rather than facing weakness, we blame somebody else for our shortcomings. Rather than accepting how a culture has departed from Christianity, we just change church to be more comfortable. This is what makes Lent seem so gloomy with all that repentance talk, but Holy Week tells us what we would rather forget. “And they cried out again, ‘Crucify him.’ And Pilate said to them, ‘Why, what evil has he done?’ But they shouted all the more, ‘Crucify him.’ So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.”

Here is a royalty that claims the judgment seat of sinners. God’s Son does not seek self-gratification, but goes the way of suffering for our sake. St. Paul says, “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” While the crowds exchanged good for evil, God chose to work good out of evil. The justice of man adjusts the rules to avoid suffering by accepting sin. In contrast, the justice of God by the Law goes straight to judging Jesus. There is no way around His suffering and this is why He sits in judgment by the cross. The power of forgiveness comes from His passion in being the promised Savior. He will not avoid you, disguise sin to be something different, or ignore the suffering. Instead, Jesus dares to answer you by His cross. He displays all sin for what it is in His Body. He subjects us to suffer His kingdom where He alone is the sacrifice.

The crucifixion is far beyond what any would deem worthy to worship. People like what lifts them up to even greater heights of glory. Royalty makes us feel secure before a powerful person. Royalty lets us bask in the beauty of another more beautiful than us. Royalty inspires dedication and worship to give even more of self. Jesus turns all of this upside down because God does what no man would ever do. His royalty is to redeem sinners by taking His place before them as the Savior. “And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. And they began to salute him, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him.”

Here is a royalty that demands worship to this king of glory. He lifts us up by bringing us down to the depths of His love. His security is a promising Word of forgiveness against what we find powerful. His beauty is a face of suffering to make us beautiful before the Father in heaven. His service is what inspires, because He already pours Himself out in the Sacrament. Where the world mocks the crucified Jesus by rejecting His royalty, we receive Him by faith. It is to crown His bloody head with honor. It is to clothe His beaten back with what we have. It is to give Him the scepter of ultimate authority. It is to kneel before His glory as king. The baptized on earth join with heaven to say, “Hail, King of the Jews.” As a professor from seminary said, “We hesitate to go to Easter, not because we do not believe, but because we do not want to leave His cross” (In Christ 119). Holy Week is beyond the high time of the Church. It defines and shapes Christianity. The royalty of Jesus Christ is to make us subjects to His kingdom of the cross. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.