

Introduction: In this week's readings, we see the Book of Signs close (John 1-11 and Jesus' many miracles, going about doing good, healing all who were oppressed by the Devil), and the Book of Glory open (that is, glory in the Cross and death of our Savior). The dividing point is John 12:36, where Jesus, having spent Himself in so many miracles, hides from the Jews who remained unmoved by Christ's miraculous deeds. At this point, the hour has come for Christ to be glorified in His sufferings and death. Let us pray to enter into the *spirit of our Savior* as He walked no more among the crowds of miracle-seekers and instead prepared to enter Jerusalem to die:

Lord, please be known to us in the fellowship of your sufferings. Help us with those who remain unmoved by the Good News of Christ's mighty deeds. Help us to point to Christ crucified as our (and their) only hope. Amen.

Monday: John 12:12-16 and Zechariah 9:9-10 & 9:14-16. Our journey with Jesus into Jerusalem on the first day of Holy Week begins with asking ourselves, "Who is this One riding on a donkey through the gate of the Holy City?" As John 12:16 says, even His disciples did not really understand all this until after Jesus ascended back into the glory of heaven. Then, illuminated by the Holy Spirit sent from there, the Apostles put together the events of Jesus' life with one central fact uniting all that they had seen: this King riding on a donkey was none other than the Promised Lord Almighty Himself, who would not only come humbly riding on a donkey but also riding on the clouds to save His people (Zech. 9:14-16).

Meditate and Pray: Thank God that the Gospel begins with the "Godness" of Jesus Christ. He was not merely a sinless man, nor just God's messenger, nor even just God's Son. He was The Lord Almighty coming to earth. The Jews clearly understood this, and therefore sought to kill Him for claiming to be God (John 10:33). What a privilege to have our eyes opened to Christ's Deity, and to worship Him as God when others blindly sought to stone Him for this very claim.

"Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity, pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel!" (Charles Wesley)

Tuesday: John 12:1-11. We backtrack one day to Saturday, the day before Palm Sunday, to see Jesus at rest in the home of dear friends Mary and Martha, and their brother Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. Why pause? Because here we see Jesus renewed and refreshed before His great struggle with His foes in Jerusalem the following week. Though Judas harassed Jesus in this very house of love which Lazarus opened up for him (John 12:4), for Jesus this home in Bethany nonetheless became His base where He would return for encouragement during the last week of His life (Mark 11:11-12 & 11:19-20). Surely Lazarus would have found his resurrected life most fulfilling, meeting the domestic needs of Jesus each day upon His return from Jerusalem! Though for Judas this home became an offense, for Lazarus it became the scene of service, helping the Son of God prepare for His great self-offering and making Lazarus' return from death all the more worth it!

Meditate and Pray: Do you have trusted Christian friends and Christian families to whom you can retreat when exhausted by the demands and even hostilities of the world? Thank God and pray that your home church would become a place where weary servants of God find great refreshment in their labors. Most of all, thank Jesus that He is willing to make Himself comfortable with us, and, along with His Father, to "come and make His home with us" (John 14:23).

Wednesday: John 12:20-23 & 12:32-33. What is Jesus' goal as He comes to Jerusalem and declares that the hour has come for Him to be glorified (John 12:23)? Verse 24 tells us: falling into the ground to die (on the Cross) as the beginning of a new harvest of salvation. He goes on to speak explicitly about the Cross in verses 32-33. To die was Jesus' goal. Jesus did not come to Jerusalem to become king: He already was The King and didn't need to come down to earth to become one. He came to earth to be planted in the ground by death on the Cross. This explains why, every time the crowds spoke about Jesus as the royal Christ (John 12:34) or tried in their zeal to make Him king (John 6:15), He "hid Himself from them" (John 12:36) – but when it came time to present Himself for death, He openly met His captors in John 18:4-8. He was determined to lay down His life voluntarily, though "no one could take it from Him" (John 10:18): all for the sake of His love for us.

Meditate and Pray: Do we love Jesus for the same reason His Father's heart was so full of affection for Him? "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life." (John 10:17) Do we make enough of the Cross as the center of our joy? May we enter more and more into the Cross-appreciating spirit of hymn #255 from our Trinity Hymnal:

*"O Jesus, we adore thee, upon the cross, our King!
We bow our hearts before thee, thy gracious name we sing.
That name hath brought salvation, that name in life our stay,
our peace, our consolation, when life shall fade away."*

*"Yet doth the world disdain thee, still passing by the cross;
Lord, may our hearts retain thee; all else we count but loss.
Ah, Lord, our sins arraigned thee, and nailed thee to the tree:
our pride, our Lord, disdained thee; yet deign our hope to be."*

(Arthur Russell, 1851)

Thursday: John 12:25-33. Jesus lived with an unselfish disregard for His own comfort: postponing present joy in this world for the future joy of purchasing sinners by His blood. In the world's estimate, as John 12:25 says, He truly "hated" His life, being willing to suffer acutely now for the sake of eternal life later. We see this suffering begin even before the cross when Jesus says in John 12:27: "Now my heart is troubled..." This word, "troubled," means agitation, disquiet or perplexity and three times describes Jesus' upset in the face of death: John 11:33, 12:27 and 13:21. As B.B. Warfield says of this troubling of Jesus' soul, this word "always expresses the emotions which conflict with death stirred in Him."

Meditate and Pray: Thank Jesus that He faced death as the curse due us for sin with a painful, serious commitment. He viewed it as an enemy to be overcome. Even more, thank Him that He not only was deeply troubled at His own upcoming death on the cross – He was also compassionately concerned with what death meant for others. In John 11:33-35, Jesus is disturbed even to tears at the grief which Lazarus' death caused. In the same way, thank Jesus for His determination to die to destroy the hold which the fear of death has over us. Now we need not fear dying: it is safe for us because Jesus took so much trouble to die in our place! See also Hebrews 2:14-15.

Friday: read John 12:36-46. This is a dark world in which men have always had a penchant for calling darkness light, and light darkness. Though Jesus came into the world as pure light (John 12:46), men in their blindness refuse to believe in Him (John 12:37) and so are given over by God to utter blindness and deafness (John 12:40). This is bad enough – to reject the light for yourself. Even worse, out of a desire that no one else should see the light of Christ which they have rejected, they criminalize Jesus, hanging Him on the Cross as a blasphemer and a traitor to God and country. How then did Jesus bear with those who so unjustly sought to smother His light of truth and hope? The answer is that He knew that even such cruel reproach was prophesied by God. As Psalm 69:20 puts it, “Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none.”

Meditate and Pray: Are you suffering the heartbreak of scorn and false accusation? Don’t be discouraged. Let us remember that Jesus went through such mistreatment *alone* so that you should never suffer alone again! As hymn # 250 verse 4 puts it, commenting on Jesus’ utter desolation for your sake (My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?”):

“Lord, should fear and anguish roll darkly over my sinful soul, thou, who once was thus bereft that thine own might ne’er be left, teach me by that bitter cry in the gloom to know thee nigh.”

(John Ellerton 1875)