

Year C, April 14, 2019
Palm Sunday
Christ Church, Mexia

A few years ago, I told you about an accident that I experienced while serving with the Army in Thailand. Essentially, I disclosed what happened before and during the accident, when the vehicle in which I was riding hit a tree and rolled over. I didn't say anything about my injuries. While the vehicle rolled over, the driver was thrown out, and I was following but when the vehicle landed upright and slid, my legs were in the vehicle, and the upper part of my body was outside resting on my arms. So, my arms were burned by friction as the vehicle slid. While the wounds themselves weren't bad, the emergency room doctor didn't realize the danger of infection. Several days after returning home, I was taken to the hospital in Bangkok. They were able to treat the infection that followed with a burn cream, that in and of itself caused pain – the doctor warned that even unconscious people would often wake up screaming when the cream was applied, but it would kill the germs and turn them into a scab-like substance, which would then stick to my bandages. These bandages had to be ripped off each morning – pulling away the infection, more cream applied, etc. It was a painful daily process that took a couple of weeks to complete, but one that thankfully saved my life. However, because of the daily pain involved, I would begin to pray when I heard the doctors approaching on their morning rounds and during the time they were removing the bandages and putting on more cream. It helped me to deal with the pain.

I suppose it is normal for most of us to pray when we find ourselves in pain or stressful situations, but of course, the prayers tend to center on ourselves. Help me, save me, make the pain go away... I cannot even begin to imagine the pain of being crucified – nailed to a cross with the weight of your body pulling against the nails until loss of blood or the pain and utter exhaustion brings the relief of death. And I suppose that if I found myself in such a situation, my thoughts would be focused on those who had done this to me, and those thoughts would be of hatred and wanting vengeance upon those who did this to me – in addition to wanting relief. I imagine most of us would feel something similar.

That's why the prayers that Jesus offers from the cross according to the author of Luke have incredible meaning for us. His first prayer is so different than the ones most of us would offer: Abba, Father, forgive them because they don't know what they're doing. Not about himself – but others. Not about hatred – but love and forgiveness. Forgiveness for the church leaders who conspired against him,

forgiveness for Judas who betrayed him and helped them, forgiveness for Pilate who yielded to the crowd even when he believed Jesus was innocent... And most of all forgiveness for the soldiers who had mocked him, beaten him, paraded him through the streets of Jerusalem, nailed him to the cross and continued to mock and harass him.

We shouldn't be totally surprised. He preached it in his Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." Jesus practiced what he preached! He lived it on the cross. He forgave them all – his disciples who hid during this time, Peter who had denied him, and us. Yes, through his actions and this prayer he forgives all of us for our sins and enables us to have eternal life with God.

But it is also a lesson for all of us. Jesus lived and died in this world, which we sometimes refer to as the real world. It was and is a world with too much hatred and violence – things with which we are all too well acquainted, in part because of the 24/7/365 news coverage. With his prayer though, Jesus also reminds us that enough is enough. The deadly cycle of violence and counter-violence that we humans perpetrate is not God's way. God's way is compassion and reconciliation and unity and peace.

Daniel Migliore, in his book, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, puts it this way: "God's compassion is greater than the murderous passions of our world, that God's glory can and does shine even in the deepest night of human savagery; that God's forgiving love is greater than our often paralyzing awareness of guilt, that God's way of life is greater than our way of death." And that leads me to the second prayer...

"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." This is the Christian hope, the hope that Jesus made possible – that one day, by the grace of God, the God who loves us so much that he gave his only son, we may live with God in the way we were created to live - for all eternity in harmony and peace. If only everyone, the whole human race, could understand and believe and live their lives accordingly...

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.