

**April 9, 2017**

**First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7**

**Second Reading: Philippians 2:6-11**

**Gospel Reading: Matthew 26:14-27:66**

**Homilist: Deacon Michael Mocek**

One method of praying with Scripture practiced and taught by Saint Ignatius Loyola, Saint Teresa of Avila, and many others down through the centuries calls us to use our imaginations by placing ourselves in Biblical scenes. Applying that practice to the two Gospel readings that we heard today from Matthew, we could take on one of several roles. We could be a disciple of Jesus, a Roman soldier, a religious leader, or a person in the crowd. So, let's consider for a moment how it might have felt to have been in the crowd as Jesus entered Jerusalem and later as he was arrested and tried, as he was mocked and scourged, and as he died on the cross.

Imagine being one of the many citizens who had gathered just outside Jerusalem waiting for the Messiah to arrive. You do not know exactly what to expect, but you had heard that a descendant of David was coming, the King of the Jews who would free Israel from occupation by the hated Romans. Then you see Jesus and his followers approaching the city. You shout, "Hosanna." You help pave the road with palm branches. You even lay your coat on the road. But as Jesus gets closer and you get a better look, you begin to wonder about him. He looks nothing like the military leader you were hoping to see mounted on a majestic horse. He is a humble-looking man riding on the back of a donkey. Instead of leading an army capable of overthrowing the Romans, he and his followers are unarmed, and he is preaching love, compassion, and forgiveness. Others in the crowd begin to ask, "Who is this man?" In Jerusalem, as the week unfolds, you hear rumors being spread by the religious leaders about Jesus. They accuse him of blasphemy, a crime punishable by death. They say he worked repeatedly on the Sabbath, another capital offense. Others begin calling for his death, and before long you join them. "Crucify him," you yell. You watch his trial. It is a mockery of justice, but public sentiment against Jesus has become so strong that you will not say anything against it. You see him beaten, mocked, and then crucified. Through it all, he offers no resistance. But, upon his death, the veil of the sanctuary is torn, the earth quakes, and you begin to wonder, "What have we done?" As you think back over the past few days, you are stunned by the sequence of events that occurred so quickly and far too easily – from initial excitement over Jesus' entry into Jerusalem to his horrific crucifixion.

Matthew's passion narrative is a warning for us to guard against unfounded expectations and disillusionment. As happened in Jerusalem, they can be fueled by rumors and demagoguery and erupt in dreadful consequences that we might live to regret. But history shows that this warning has largely gone unheeded. Unfounded expectations, disillusionment, rumors, and demagoguery have driven some of the most tragic events of all time – the Christian crusades and inquisitions of the middle ages; the witch hunts, slave trade, and Ku Klux Klan activities that stain the history of our country; and the holocaust of World War II. Many atrocities in our world today are being committed by individuals who have fallen victim to unfounded expectations and disillusionment – genocide, terrorism, and other affronts to the dignity of life

that manifest themselves in so many ways. So how can we heed Matthew's warning to guard against the consequences of unfounded expectations and disillusionment? As usual, the Gospel shows us the way. Instead of falling prey to the rumors and demagoguery of our time, let us stay close to the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. The Gospel even provides a few sound bites to help us remember what it takes to follow Jesus – feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, comfort the sick, visit those in prison, and welcome the stranger.