

## **My Dear Brothers and Sisters,**

About three months ago we were celebrating the Epiphany of the Lord. Before that we were decorated for Christmas and before that for Thanksgiving, and before that for Halloween, and before that.... Well, you get the idea. We decorate, we remember, we celebrate with real things. They remind us, invite us, and help us to participate in what is happening. And Holy Week is no different.

We are blessing palms. We wash feet. We venerate the cross. We share the body and blood of Christ. But this year will be different. We will not gather to bless our palms and sing All Glory, Laud, and Honor. We will not wash feet on Holy Thursday. And we will not share the body and blood of Jesus.

We may not be gathering in person but it will still be Holy Week. So let's still decorate, remember, and celebrate. Let's be present and participate. Let's make our homes a house of worship, a little church, and a reminder to ourselves and the world that it is Holy Week.

Here are some ways we could do that:

- For Palm Sunday you can hang some palms or leafy branches on your front door. Set up a table in your house. Cover it with a red cloth and set your palms or leafy branches on it.
- On Holy Thursday keep the table covered in red and set out a bowl or basin, a pitcher of water, and a towel as a symbol of love for others.

- On Good Friday remove the table covering and let the table remain bare. Set a plain and simple cross on it. Remember, Jesus doesn't take us off our cross. He gets up there with us.
- On Easter Sunday hang some flowers and a white cloth on your front door or cover the table with a white cloth and set out a bouquet of flowers and a lit candle. Proclaim beauty, light, life, and hope. Alleluia!

Holy Week will not happen in the church this year, at least not like it has in previous years. But here is the thing, Holy Week never really did happen in the church. It happens in our lives. Maybe this is the year to rediscover that. Maybe this year we rediscover that Holy Week is about more than reenacting or telling the story of what happened to Jesus. It is about giving thanks for and experiencing Jesus walking with us through the Holy Week of our life.

I have heard clergy and laity alike worrying about Holy Week. What are we going to do? How do we do Holy Week in the midst of a pandemic when we cannot be together in person? How can we make it meaningful? I get it. To some extent I have been one of them. But here is what I also get. This pandemic does not stand as a barrier or in opposition to Holy Week. The pandemic is our Holy Week. We don't need to try and make Holy Week "normal" or like previous years. We need to experience and connect to Holy Week, not in spite of what is happening, but through what is happening.

Look into the pandemic and you will see triumphant palm waving that has given way to loss and brokenness. You will see humble and selfless acts of love. You will see feet being washed even when shoes and socks are never removed. You will see not only the deaths of people, but the deaths of life as it used to be, plans and routines, illusions, exceptionalism, and self-sufficiency. The peoples of the earth really have been made of one blood. You will see people waiting in the emptiness, loneliness, and darkness of Holy Saturday wondering, “How long, O Lord?” And who among us doesn’t know what that is like? Look into the pandemic and you will see Holy Week. It has never been more real than it is this year.

**My Dear Brothers and Sisters,**

I don’t know when or how we will get through this pandemic, but I know this. Every cross flowers with new life, every tomb is a workshop of resurrection, and every Holy Week is the raw material for a new creation. **Amen.**