

04/13/14 Palm/Passion Sunday A

-- The passion account of Matthew is full of many interesting elements: political intrigue, betrayal, disappointment, suffering, majesty...just to name a few. You could easily do five or six homilies on it. I'll resist that temptation today.

-- But one thing stands out in the final scene of Jesus on the cross. In Matthew's passion he only says one thing: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

-- He is hanging there, naked, broken and utterly humiliated. His disciples have cut and run away. Most of the people within earshot shout curses in his face. Who wouldn't feel abandoned and forsaken?

-- Yet, a good Jew would instantly recognize those words as the first words of Psalm 22. Jesus was actually praying on the cross. He was praying the prayer of so many prophets and faithful people who felt hate and derision from those around them for speaking the truth.

-- Good men and women before Jesus had taken much grief from their fellow countrymen for challenging sinful ways and speaking truthfully. The psalmist gives us the prayer of one who is beaten down but has not lost all hope. He still trusts that God will deliver him. This is the prayer Jesus makes to his Father on the cross.

-- Most of us experience humiliation at one time or another in life. Some people experience great undeserved suffering. Most of us likely know people like that. They may well be in our own families.

-- Innocent suffering can lead in two very different ways. When some people are deeply humiliated, they become angry, defensive and bitter. Some even end up acting out their hurt violently against others. Mass murderers have been born of this type of humiliation.

-- Others, though, dig deeper in their souls to develop an abiding trust in, and understanding of, God. That is what the psalmist did. That is the purpose of the prayer that was on Jesus' lips just before he died.

-- In his case, that suffering was not just admirable. It was redemptive for the whole human race.

-- *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* We have all felt like saying this at one time or another. When we do, which way will we turn?

-- Will we turn to resentment, anger and violence, or will we turn to a deeper, abiding trust in the Lord, who alone can save us?