

Alone but not Forsaken

And so it begins.....

It begins with a meal.

It continues with abandonment.

It concludes with the Lord crying out the first words of Psalm 22: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

The Passion in the Gospel of Mark teaches us that following Christ means following the One who was abandoned by all who would not accept His cross.

It all begins with a meal. During this meal that we call the Last Supper, Jesus presents bread and wine and transforms them into the Body and Blood of the New Covenant. We have heard a lot about covenants this Lent. There was the covenant with Noah, stating that God would not give up on his people. There was the covenant with Abraham, the covenant of faith, stating that God supports us through our struggles in faith. There was the covenant with Moses, the covenant of the Ten Commandments, telling us that God would give us the way to live his life. There was the covenant prophesied by Jeremiah, the New Covenant of a new law that would be written in the hearts of the people. Now, at the Last Supper and at every Mass, we receive the New Covenant of the Body and Blood of the Lord. By receiving this covenant, we accept our sharing in the sacrificial love of the Lord. By receiving communion we agree to join the Lord in giving ourselves over to the eternal love of his Father.

The disciples were not ready to accept the New Covenant that first Holy Week. One by one they abandoned Jesus. Judas betrayed him. Peter denied him. None of the others are accounted for in this Gospel except a few women looking on from a distance. Even the crowd that had been so enthusiastic when they witnessed Jesus's miracles had abandoned him. They preferred a violent rebel, Barsabbas, rather than the Prince of Peace. One courageous member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimethea, risked his reputation to bury Jesus with dignity. He was quite alone.

They all abandoned Jesus. Did even his Father abandon him? Perhaps, this might appear to have happened if we only focus on the first words of Psalm 22 that Jesus began praying from the cross. But this cry of the faithful child of God in pain ends with God coming and defending his loved one. Jesus dies abandoned, but not alone.

Listen to the words of Psalm 22:

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why so far from my call for help, from my cries of anguish?

My God, I call by day, but you do not answer; by night, but I have no relief.

Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the glory of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted and you rescued them. To you they cried out and they escaped; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.

But I am a worm, hardly human, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they curl their lips and jeer; they shake their heads at me:

"You relied on the LORD--let him deliver you; if he loves you, let him rescue you."

Yet you drew me forth from the womb, made me safe at my mother's breast. Upon you I was thrust from the womb; since birth you are my God.

Do not stay far from me, for trouble is near, and there is no one to help. Many bulls surround me; fierce bulls of Bashan encircle me. They open their mouths against me, lions that rend and roar. Like water my life drains away; all my bones grow soft. My heart has become like wax, it melts away within me. As dry as a potsherd is my throat; my tongue sticks to my palate; you lay me in the dust of death.

Many dogs surround me; a pack of evildoers closes in on me. So wasted are my hands and feet that I can count all my bones. They stare at me and gloat; they divide my garments among them; for my clothing they cast lots.

But you, LORD, do not stay far off; my strength, come quickly to help me. Deliver me from the sword, my forlorn life from the teeth of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth, my poor life from the horns of wild bulls.

Then I will proclaim your name to the assembly; in the community I will praise you: "You who fear the LORD, give praise! All descendants of Jacob, give honor; show reverence, all descendants of Israel!"

For God has not spurned or disdained the misery of this poor wretch, Did not turn away from me, but heard me when I cried out.

I will offer praise in the great assembly; my vows I will fulfill before those who fear him.

The poor will eat their fill; those who seek the LORD will offer praise. May your hearts enjoy life forever!"

All the ends of the earth will worship and turn to the LORD; All the families of nations will bow low before you. For kingship belongs to the LORD, the ruler over the nations. All who sleep in the earth will bow low before God; All who have gone down into the dust will kneel in homage.

And I will live for the LORD; my descendants will serve you.

The generation to come will be told of the Lord, that they may proclaim to a people yet unborn the deliverance you have brought.

We pray today that we might be among those who accept the cross, the Lord's cross and our crosses. May we be among those who proclaim the deliverance of God to

every generation.