

Bishop Jaime Soto
Homily for Palm Sunday, April 13, 2014

This evening before going to bed, step outside. Hopefully, it is a clear night sky. The moon will have already risen. It is still be two days short of a full moon. It would have been on such a night, a night with a Passover moon when Jesus and the twelve sang the last hymn of their Passover meal. The Lord led them out from the room where they had eaten to the Mount of Olives. If the skies were as clear as the recent night skies in Sacramento, the soft moonlight would light their way. In that silvery light Jesus would look around at his closest friends, foretelling to Peter and the others their pending desertions and denials leaving him alone with the temple guards.

Entering among the trees of the olive grove the disciples would watch Jesus go off alone to pray. If there had been a slight breeze, the branches would rustle and the faint moonlight would quiver among the shadows of the gnarly olive branches, their pale green leaves now gray under the nocturnal glow. Jesus may have chosen a spot where a shaft of light provided some solace as He pondered the gathering gloom of the events to come. Resting under this light, he would raise his eyes to heaven and pray, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet,

not as I will, but as you will.” For a response there was only the breeze and the silent lunar sentinel overhead.

Jesus went to the drowsy disciples to admonish and encourage them. He then returned to that spot where only the moon and stars seem attentive to his anguish and prayed again, “My Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it, your will be done!” Perhaps hungering for some company he returns to his slumbering friends, fatigued by sorrow. The gospel says that the Lord at that moment said nothing to them. He only looked on them. What thoughts of love and worry, may have been running through his mind. Was it a shepherd’s concern or a friend’s aching heart that fixed a gaze upon the muted muddle of bodies weighed down by the darkness?

A third time, the Lord Jesus returned to the soft spill of light, once more hoping to keep the shadows at bay. Maybe he heard the mumbled clamor of a crowd led by Judas coming up the hill. Time was now slipping away so one more time, he prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it, your will be done!” He returns again to his disciples. The smoking torches of the mob and Judas are already casting their harsh burning light in the grove. The disciples are beginning to stir with fright. To them Jesus said, “Behold, the hour is at hand.”

The scene in the garden of Gethsemane is an anxious, confounding moment. (Mt. 26.36-46) Few other episodes in the earthly life of Jesus cause such consternation as those few quiet, dreadful moments on the Mount of Olives. The humanity and the divinity of Jesus are put to the ultimate test. Too often we can lean on the divinity of the Lord to soften the ambiguity and fear of this chapter of salvation. Did his divine nature already know the outcome? Why then, the seeming tense terror of his supplications? We can too readily presume that the divinity was aloof from the fickle folly of human affairs. This presumption hopes to spare Jesus the human anxiety and fear so common to us all. But Jesus was afraid. He was very anxious, for his friends, for his mission, for himself. His divinity was revealed not in any foreknowledge that dispelled the uncertainty or ambiguity about what was to transpire that night. The divinity of the Jesus, the Son of the Almighty God was revealed in his undying trust and his loving obedience to the Father. We come to know Jesus as the divine Son of the heavenly Father because he was obedient, even unto death, death on a cross.

As Paul tells us in the second reading today, “he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (Phil. 2.6-11) The power of the cross is the power of the trust and obedience Jesus gave to His Heavenly Father.

When we speak of ourselves as being the adopted daughters and sons of God through our sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus, understand what this means. Jesus fully shared in our humanity so that we could share in his divinity. The Mount of Olives shows us how painfully his divinity shared in our humanity and how powerfully His divinity redeemed our humanity. Amidst the lights and shadows of the Garden, Jesus, both humanly and divinely was the obedient Son of the Father. Our share in the divinity of Jesus comes when we bring our humanity to trust in the wisdom of our God, our Father, and obediently follow the inspiration of His Holy Spirit.

In every Eucharist, the Lord Jesus says to us those words which he offered to his disciples in the gospel today, "Take and eat. ... Take and drink". (Mt. 26.26-30) When we take and eat the Bread of Life, when we take and drink the saving Blood of Christ we place our trust in same merciful Father who raised His Son from the dead. We drink of the one Spirit that makes us obedient daughters and sons of God. May the divinely inspired words of Jesus become our own human desire, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."