March 29, 2015
Palm Sunday – The Passion According to St. Mark
“Make This Week Personal to You”
Deacon Dave Snyder

HOMILY

Maybe you remember reading the headlines at the time – it was about a year and a half ago when the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya in Eastern Africa, was attacked and several people were held hostage for up to 3 days. We might hear news reports of an incident like this, and wonder why it is happening, and who is behind it, and we may even say a prayer for those affected, but then tend to forget about it shortly afterwards. Sadly, we’ve almost become numb to these types of reports. But my extended family will remember this particular incident for quite some time. You see, there was a very close and personal friend of ours in that mall when it happened – thankfully, the friend made it through the ordeal safely. We will especially remember this because … it was personal.

We human beings are like that, aren’t we? The closer something hits home, as the saying goes, then the more personal it usually becomes, and the more interested we are in it. Consider government or charitable programs – if we directly benefit from a particular program, or know someone close to us who does, we might have a greater interest in the overall success of that program. Likewise, the more personal an event or incident is, then the more we are drawn into it, and the more we are affected by the outcome, and the more we ultimately remember it, maybe even the details surrounding it. We may even keep the event alive within us, by telling, and maybe even retelling, the story to others. Because … it has a special meaning to us … it’s personal.

In just a couple of minutes, we will again hear the Passion and Death story of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Depending on your particular circumstances, you may have heard the story just a few times, or maybe as much as dozens of times. You may have even read it in the Bible. You know the story, you know the ending of the Passion, and you certainly know the hope-filled, Resurrection story that follows and that our Christian faith is built on. Because of that, it may be somewhat tempting to hear the Passion again and only half-listen in. But, I’ll invite you to do something different when you hear it today, if you are not already doing it. Jesus loves each and every one of us, each of us here today, each of us throughout the world. He wants to have a personal relationship with each and every one of us. This story, this Passion that you are about to hear is not a story that happened once, meant to be tucked away in our minds and heard once or twice a year. It’s a story
that *is* personal, because God’s love for us *is* personal, and the story is *meant* to be kept alive for each of us … for YOU, it’s a story that’s meant to be told and retold, by you to others around you, others that may need to hear how God loves each of them, loves them so much that He allowed His Son to suffer and die for their sake, and here is the story of that suffering and death. You can *do* this, because … it’s personal.

Now, I’m going to invite you to carry this one step further. As you hear the Passion story, as you *listen* to the Passion story, consider yourself to be more fully involved on a personal level by being a witness to each part of the story as it’s told. In fact, consider yourself part of the story, not just in a bubble or time machine watching it, but dressed as others in the times, part of those around Jesus. For example, picture yourself there in Simon the leper’s house as the unnamed woman breaks the jar of perfumed oil and pours the liquid over Jesus’ head – this Jesus whom you know and have a personal relationship with. Later on, you are at the Passover table when Jesus shares with others at the table the bread and wine that He blessed. You are there with Jesus at Gethsemane, then, in succession, in front of the high priest, Pilate and the soldiers, watching as this terrible injustice you are witnessing builds greater and greater, and you find yourself asking, “Why is all this happening to Jesus?” – this Jesus whom you know and have a personal relationship with. You are there near Him … as His closest friends, His disciples, abandon Him … and strangers, such as Simon the Cyrenian, are tasked to help Him. You personally witness the six hours Jesus is on the cross until He dies, and then watch as others place His broken body in another’s tomb. And all the while, you helplessly witness and ask, “How can I stop all this from happening? How can I help this Jesus whom I know and have a personal relationship with?”

You CAN help by reading and studying more about His life, Passion and death. You CAN help by keeping the event alive, to yourself and to others. Current author and popular speaker Matthew Kelly suggests that you can make this your best Lent ever – I invite you to make this your best Holy Week ever. And then, after this week, become your best self as a disciple of Jesus … to retell His story and of His great love for each and every one of us. You can do this, because … it’s personal.