Homily, 25 March 2018
Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion (Cycle B)

At the Procession with Palms: Mark 11:1-10
At the Mass: Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalms 22:8-9,17-18,19-20,23-24; Philippians 2:6-11; Mark 14:1-15:47

---

At the Procession:

As we prepare to hear the Passion of the Lord, it's hard to decide exactly what we feel. Are we saddened or hopeful, angry or resigned? Do we picture ourselves among the first crowd that rejoices as Jesus approaches Jerusalem or, do we feel ashamed that we might have found ourselves among the angry crowd that condemned Jesus before Pilate?

Perhaps we ought recall the words of Jesus to Nicodemus:

"Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him."

Maybe what we feel is the prompting of the Holy Spirit calling us to a deeper and profound 'fear of the Lord;' a deep sense of awe at the providence of God. What can we say before such a mystery but "What wondrous love is this, oh my soul, oh my soul? What wondrous love is this?"

---

At the Mass:

You have heard the Passion of Lord.
It is a challenging reading, one that fills us alternately with anger and disgust, with wonder and sorrow: disgust and anger at the betrayal, cowardice, hatred and evil of some of the people in the story, sorrow at the suffering of Jesus, wonder at his response to his persecutors, and his love for his heavenly Father.

At the very beginning of the passion, there is a person whose love and devotion to Jesus we ought to recall. Indeed, Jesus said of her; "wherever the gospel is proclaimed, what she has done will be told in memory of her."
She was the woman who entered Simon's house with an alabaster jar of perfumed oil, broke it and poured on Jesus head. It was a gesture of love, and devotion, and care to someone she knew was about die.

She couldn't prevent what was about to happen, but she could see its deeper meaning as an act of great love. Did she also understand that the passion was part of God's providence? An act of divine atonement for human sin and the salvation of us all? Perhaps, certainly more than many who were present to those events.

As I reflected on the Lord's Passion this week, and on this woman in particular, I recalled a short story that I used to read to my children when they were little. It's story by Oscar Wilde called "The Selfish Giant." I felt compelled to find the book and read it again.

As the title states, it's the story of a selfish giant. He has a castle with a beautiful garden. But he wants it for himself alone. To keep the neighborhood children out, he builds a wall around the garden. He was so selfish and possessive of his beautiful garden, that Spring decided she would stay out too, and so it happened that in his garden it was always winter.

Eventually, his heart softens, and he regrets his selfishness. He performs a small act of kindness to a little boy. And in turn the little boy gives him a small sign of love – a hug, and kiss – and the giant is transformed. One wonders how long it had been since the giant was shown even that smallest act of love.

Well the giant grows old and every year, with the arrival of spring, he delights in the children who play in his garden. But the little boy he never sees again.

As I reread the story and came to the last page, I discovered what this story had to do with the Lord's Passion. So listen as I read the ending:

By now the giant was quite old and feeble. One late winter morning he was looking out his window …

_Suddenly he rubbed his eyes in wonder, and looked and looked. It certainly was a marvelous sight. In the farthest corner of the garden was a tree quite covered with lovely white blossoms. Its branches were all golden, and silver fruit hung down from them, and underneath it stood the little boy he had loved._
Downstairs ran the Giant in great joy, and out into the garden. He hastened across the grass, and came near to the child. And when he came quite close his face grew red with anger, and he said, 'Who hath dared to wound thee?' For on the palms of the child's hands were the prints of two nails, and the prints of two nails were on the little feet.

'Who hath dared to wound thee?' cried the Giant; 'tell me, that I may take my big sword and slay him.'

'Nay!' answered the child; 'but these are the wounds of Love.'

'Who art thou?' said the Giant, and a strange awe fell on him, and he knelt before the little child.

And the child smiled on the Giant, and said to him, 'You let me play once in your garden, to-day you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise.'

And when the children ran in that afternoon, they found the Giant lying dead under the tree, all covered with white blossoms.

That one short line -- 'but these are the wounds of Love.' That's what connects this story with the Passion. And perhaps, it explains the actions of that woman, the one who anointed Jesus. In anointing him for death, perhaps she saw that his wounds, would be wounds of love.