

Dear Brothers and Sisters



One of the priests who came to help at the Deanery Penance Service this past Monday asked me for Advil. He had hurt his back doing manual work.

I knew how he felt, because a few years ago I also threw my back out. While simply bending down to pick something up, I was suddenly crippled in agony.

Turns out this is a common thing in middle aged men! The cause, I discovered, was a lack of core strength – something we hear a lot about today. The solution? Exercise the lower back – planks, bridges, pushups.... or Gyms invite us to take out a

membership, join a spinning class, or sign up for Cross Fit; all in the name of building physical core strength.

But we also have a Spiritual Core, which needs strength.

Palm Sunday shows us how to strengthen our Spiritual Core. The palms which we receive today are single leaves from the palm branch, which looks like a spinal column; a backbone, it is a symbol of Faith. Our standing upright, our core strength, comes not from the Gym, or Cross Fit, or bodily exercise, but from the faith which we profess in Jesus Christ, Crucified and Risen. Without faith we are crippled! We cannot bend down to serve our neighbor; we are unable to reach up to God.

Holy Week strengthens our faith; allowing us to stand upright. Holding our palms aloft, we sing 'Hosanna' – which means 'Blessed be God!' This acclamation of blessing is found on the lips of all who are witnesses to God's action in their lives. We are witnessing that God is the one who has stooped down to fallen humanity; He bent down to us. Descending from Heaven to Earth, he abased himself to become a servant, he was lowered into the tomb, and descended into Hell. But He now stands upright, Risen, interceding for us at the right hand of the Father.

The Resurrection of Christ is the only thing that can vanquish death itself, and consequently the only thing which is able to raise up the lowly. It is the only thing which can allow the crippled to stand upright!

The Gospel can be summarized in two phrases: 'Love your enemies' and 'I am coming soon.' Christ Jesus has made an appointment with each of us this Holy Week. He has loved us when we were his enemies, and he has promised to come to us this week. May today's celebration lead us to truly experience the Paschal Mystery, that we who are crippled may stand upright. Just as we have partaken in his suffering and death, we also may become witnesses and bearers of his Resurrection.

Fr. Sean