

April 1, 2007
Passion Sunday

Good Morning! Today as we enter into the holiest of all weeks, the second reading really gives the summation of the life of Christ and the summation of this week. And, it is the hymn of Philippians – Philippians 2, “though He was in the form of God, Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at, rather He emptied Himself and took the form of a slave – being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate and He humbled Himself even more, obedient in accepting death – death on a cross.” When we focus on this reality, we listen again in the gospel and it says – when they start fighting over who is the greatest – he says “the one who serves...I have come among you as one who serves.” If you listen to the opening prayer of this Mass, it says “Jesus, the model of humility...” So first we need to focus on the audacity of the humility of God – that here the king of kings and the lord of lords, the God of all creation comes and humbles Himself – think about it! God left heaven, and as God left heaven, He became a man to become our slave! Do you get that? He emptied Himself - took the form of a slave – became obedient to Pilot, to Herod, to the High Priest. The people He created, who could have gone “bam, you don’t exist anymore...” He could have said “stop it all – I am getting off of this ride...” any time He wanted – He was God. And yet He emptied Himself – became obedient, humbled Himself and became obedient to death, for you – for me, on the cross. The people who tortured Him, He said “forgive them Father...” And so must we. He did all that to save us, but then to show us how we must live. You know, Holy Week – if Holy Week just becomes something we cry about what Jesus did for us 2,000 years ago, and we feel all good because we feel all bad, well then we missed the whole point of Holy Week. Holy Week is that we look at what Jesus did for us, and then we use Him as our model, and how then must we live. What does that mean for us? It means we need to empty ourselves – empty ourselves. We need to become slaves. We need to humble ourselves and we need to become obedient unto death. Now, most Catholics don’t buy that – they just don’t! We sit there and we go through this thing – we watch the movie the “Passion” and we cry and we feel good about ourselves. But most people still want to have it their way. And if God wouldn’t have it His way – how can we? You know, this week I did the Passion Talk up in Columbus – you know, I did my regular Passion like I will do here on Wednesday, and of course, the next day someone sent an email and they were offended. You know, I get a lot of those type emails, as you know, about how I offended you, or I get letters, you know, how I have offended you, and you know, who cares? I just don’t care anymore, because everybody is offended! We are all just supposed to drop because, “oh, I’m offended...” I have just about had it, because people are all into themselves. Do you know why the person was offended, because of course, in the Passion talk about we will stand before Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ will be our judge. Not Barney, not Bill Clinton, not the Democratic Party, not the priests or liberals, and oh my gosh the guy had to be a Democrat. And you know, it was just one example. And so the whole night he was mad, and he went and wrote “I’m offended...” Oh, shut up! Just stop it! If that is all you got out of the whole Passion Talk, you were looking to be offended! And sometimes people are looking to be offended! Why? Because they are the center of their own universe. “The

Church better listen to me – I better listen to me – everybody – God better listen to me, or I am mad, I am offended, I am out of here!” Goodbye! You know, Jesus said it – “are you leaving me too?” The rest of them just left! Because, if we are going to be offended and leave Christ, or leave the Church because we are offended – get out now, huh? Do everybody a favor, because you really don’t belong! You are not here to serve – you are here to have people tell you what you want to hear, and that is not what God did. God humbled Himself, became obedient, emptied Himself unto death. And that was a big offense – Christ was offended as they cried out “Crucify Him – Crucify Him! You saved others! Prophecy! Prophecy!” Boy was He offended! Wow! And yet He humbled Himself more! Emptied Himself more! Was obedient to Pilot. You know, and again, I don’t know if you have been watching TV in the last month, or FOX News, huh? I don’t know if you are one of those that watches FOX News – I am! But anyway, if you haven’t seen it in the last couple of months – you have been seeing like – Bill O’Reilly and Sean Hannity, you know? And they have been fighting with the Catholic Church, because, both of them call themselves Catholic. And, because they are Ultra-Conservatives, they think they got the corner on Catholicism, huh? But what happens is a couple of weeks ago, Sean Hannity, who I usually agree with 1,000 percent was debating with a priest over the teaching of the Church and completely disagreed with the Church on a couple of issues – the same with Bill O’Reilly. Now, when it comes down to who is right – Bill O’Reilly, Sean Hannity, or the Church – who do they agree with? Bill O’Reilly and Sean Hannity. And so, they know more than the Church. And sometimes when you sit there and be indignant and go “can you imagine...” But we are the same way – oh, yea. Everybody here – I am sure there is something that you don’t like about the Church – you don’t agree with. “Well, I know that’s the rule, but I don’t really buy it.” Well, then who is more right? Who has humbled themselves? You or the Church? “I am.” Wrong answer! Where is the humility? Where is the obedience that God calls you and me to? We don’t make up the rules! We are obedient to the rules. And if we are truly going to follow Jesus Christ we need to empty ourselves, we need to humble ourselves, we need to be obedient unto death. And that is very basic. That means that when the Church tells us – that means that the Church is God on earth – I hope you get that. When the Church speaks officially, it is God’s word on earth. So, you can sit there and play games and say “oh, I only listen to God, and the Church I don’t listen to, but I listen to God...” that is called pride! Jesus could have said “hey, listen, I don’t have to listen to you! You’re Pilot – the High Priest – I am God! I make the rules!” But what did He do? He humbled Himself and died! Will you and I humble ourselves and die in obedience to Christ through His Church? Or will we sit there and say “I know I’m going to make the decisions around here...” Where is the humility? And again, we don’t have to become “la la” to do that. You know, one of the biggest things I had to do in my life was take a vow of obedience – twice! And I only took the vow of celibacy once. But they make us take obedience twice! I wonder why that is. Because obedience is the hardest of all of the virtues! Obedience is I have to take my will and submit it to the other! And if I wasn’t obedient, I wouldn’t be pastor here! And some of you are wishing “oh, I wish you weren’t obedient, Father...” But that is the reality! The church would still be where it was five years ago if I was not obedient, died to myself, when the Bishop told me to be head of the Bread of Life 10 years ago and I said “absolutely not!” And he said “I’m not asking...I’m telling.” “Yes, Bishop.” It is in obedience as Christ taught us where salvation and life is. It is in obedience as Christ

taught us by the example of His life and death where we will find life. So today when you and I enter into this Holy Week will it be something in history that we just look back on and cry because of the Passion of Jesus, or will we say “Jesus, as you were obedient to death, teach me to empty myself. Teach me to be obedient – to be a slave. To humble myself unto death so that I don’t just watch you Lord, from afar, but that I enter into your Passion this week with you.” And when you and I do that, when we die on the cross by being obedient to others, then we will all have a great Easter, because the only way to experience resurrection, and joy, and life, is through obedience unto death. And when it kills us – that’s when it is best. Don’t you hate it? May each of you know His love today and forever! Amen.