

**Let's Face It**  
Homily of March 24, 2002  
by Fr. Michael Dibble

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We have a brisk idiom in America, three words, "Let's face it. Let's face it." So that's our, your and my, theme this morning, Palm Sunday. Let's face it ... let's face Him, our Lord. Let's face it's a tough week ahead, and I know for some of you it's been a tough year. But, in the Church here, it's a tough week ahead. We're going to follow Him up a cross, where He's going to hang, naked and suffocating and bleeding to death, so let's face it.

March is not my favorite month. In 1958 it was the worst month of my life 'cause of family troubles, and somebody handed me a little card with the word "face" on it - never forget, March 1958. Now I was in college, and the thing said, it's an old prayer from the Bible, some Jewish lady or gentleman wrote it, three thousand years ago. "Lord let Your face shine on me, Your servant. Let your face shine on me." So let's face it.

This little book is very old, and it's called "The Spiritual Exercises Of St. Ignatius". Don't be scared by the title. It's a great little book, and if you think you can't meditate, and I didn't think I could - too nervous! - I discovered this little book a long time ago. It was written four hundred years ago (not this exact copy)! And St. Ignatius, who wrote it, he could have been a movie director because he makes you see the faces! He takes you through our Lord's life, and he puts you right there, and you're seeing Palm Sunday, you're seeing faces all through our Lord's life. I'll never forget, I said, "oh, I meditated, even I, I meditated!" because he makes you see faces - human faces. They're so expressive, aren't they? Aren't you? At an airport, I love looking at faces - you know, waiting at the gate for somebody to come off the airplane that they haven't seen for a long time. And the faces, the greeting faces - they're elated! They don't have to say a word, just ...

Tonight at the Oscars, I love movies, but I've never watched the Oscars, never, because I can't look at the faces. At the camera gliding in with sadistic glee at the faces of the four losers, who put on a kind of rictus of a smile. I've told some of you that my father was a cartoonist, and even as a little kid - he had one of those slanting desks - my Dad would make the faces of the cartoons he was drawing (makes faces, laughter!). I'll never forget later on, he told me that this was the enigmatic face - you know that kind of face college kids used to tell me they found so sensual, and indifferent and cold (more faces, laughter!). College kids used to say, "That face drives me CRAZY!" (Laughter.)

You and I have to spend a good number of our hours on this planet being two-faced, and I don't mean in a bad way. That just common sense and courtesy, you have to be two-faced, you have to put on a mask most of the day. You know, at work - and you've just been working the night before on taxes or troubles. "Hi, how you doing?" "Fine! Hi!" Or some of you coming into Mass this morning; group of this size, again let's just take somebody young who's been madly infatuated with somebody, a crush on somebody, and it's just been rejected and you wish you were dead, and you walk into Mass, "Hi!" "Oh, hello!" You've got to be, out of sheer kindness to other people, two-faced no matter what you're going through. But at Mass, you can take it off. You sit there and listen to our Lord's words in the Gospel, and you receive communion. Off comes the mask - here's my face. It could be a happy face, but it could be, "Lord, let's face it, this is tough." Let's face Jesus Christ. Now, I keep using this phrase because in March of 58 when I was losing my faith because of family troubles, everything was going wrong, and I was studying to be a priest! And I read that thing by C.S. Lewis - Jesus Christ, nothing makes sense aside from Christ. Lovely music, a beautiful church, I know I've said this a lot, but it changed my - it saved my faith! C.S. Lewis wrote, a convert, "Look at Christ - not at this or that person, this or that clergyman, this or that church, this or that ceremony, this or that mortal sin, this or that venal sin. Look at Christ - he's either a liar, a lunatic, or he was on the level. He was the Lord. If he was the Lord, not crazy, and not a political maneuverer, then everything can make sense." Suffering? You get through it. You can even survive the clergy.

I love reading the history of the Church - I loved it. I mean, we had such characters in two thousand years of the Church! But with Christ, you can get through it. The night our Lord was arrested, he had been with people for three years - his apostles, they took off! They had seen Jesus, face to face, for three years and the night he's arrested, they split! Two of them hung around - St. John and Peter, kind of way back. At one point in the Church, I told you this once before, we had three guys saying, "I'm Pope!" "No, I'm Pope!" "No, I'm Pope!" Three of them! I mean, we've had such catastrophes, and as one convert said to me, "The Church must be the church of Christ - it has survived the clergy!" Because women and men and kids hang on to Christ - they don't pat him on the head, "nice little Jesus." I've known some devout, I'm using that adjective very seriously, devout Catholics who, they don't come out and say it, but I've been a priest a long time and sometimes I get the feeling that they love Jesus but they kind of pat Him on the head, as if, "Well, he wasn't really," they don't articulate it, but I get the gut level feeling, "He wasn't really realistic, He didn't really know what we're going through when he talks about misuse of power, and greed. No, he wasn't really, you know, living." But He was. And you and I are so lucky because in the past 30 years Catholic scholars, solid Catholic Bible scholars as well as a lot of non-Catholics, they've given us the words and the life of Jesus with all kinds of anthropological and semantic details, so that now we know exactly the text of what our Lord said, AND the subtext. What an amazing man! Tender and kind with sinners, but boy did Jesus have an edge and a bite,

and anger with so-called perfect people! And in 1958 when I was losing my faith, I said, "Yeah, I don't think he was lunatic - he couldn't have said the things he did. I don't think he's a liar - I guess he was on the level." So, I can survive anything with Christ. Without Christ, let's go out and have, you know, an omelet. I'd like a Swiss cheese omelet, and let's forget the whole thing.

Two thousand years and we've survived. Because of men and woman saying, "I want Christ, I want the Eucharist, I want the Mass." You people, that's true.

Now on Palm Sunday, St. Ignatius takes you through faces in the full book - it's a thick book, thicker than this - and on Palm Sunday, let's look at the faces, just for a second. The faces that were sneering. I mean some of our Lord's enemies were going to arrest him in about a week. Standing on the outskirts of the crowd, "Look at these jerks, following Him." St. John, in the Gospel - face to face with Christ - St. John tells us that our Lord's enemies turn him over the Roman soldiers out of jealousy. Personal opinion - I think that's the worst of the seven big sins because it doesn't even give us any fun! It's just destructive. So they're standing on the outside of the crowd. Then, our Lord's apostles - oh, all 12 of them are here on Palm Sunday! Poor schleps, thinking, "Oh now we've got it! Now we've got it! Look at the crowd, look at the palms, at last we're coming into it, we've got it now!" Judas especially, I bet you. And by the way, that line at the end, some of the people are saying, "Who's that?" And some people are saying, "He's THE prophet." Now, the word "the," again from the scholarship of the Greek word and the Aramaic root, "the" means "HE'S it!" Not, oh he's a prophet; he's a great guy. THE prophet, but he's the last messenger from God. The final word of God, face to face with God - THE prophet.

And our Lord's face, I think serene, peaceful, riding in on a jackass. Now again, we realize now our Lord's making a statement, not because he's a weak little nebbish - nothing nebbish-y about Christ, when you hear his actual words. He rides in on a jackass because the ordinary way of going into a city would be on a steed. There was this big exhibit in the museum in New York before I left, The Steeds of Venice, or something - these huge sculptures in the museum of these magnificent steeds. That's what a conqueror rode into a city on, a steed! You know, a snorting magnificent horse! Our Lord rides in on a jackass to make a statement. This is the kind of King you got; this is the kind of life you got to lead. "Oh, nice little Jesus, you really don't understand." That's Christ. With Christ, everything makes sense.

I really am getting very close to the end, a doctor in this parish, who's in his forties; I say this to indicate, not a child. He's been through many a Lent. He said, "You know, it just dawned on me." And I, playing the eternal stooge, said, "What?" And he said, "When Christ is hanging on the cross, he says, 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' Our Lord wasn't acting!" He had to feel what I think just about everyone in this Church over the age of 10 must have felt at least once - "Why?" That

utter desolation - He had to feel it, He wasn't acting, He had to know exactly how low you can get. Had to - otherwise it's just a big charade. Why have you abandoned me?

And finally, I got a phone call - I keep saying finally - but I got a phone call from this scientist who's on an Ivy League campus back East, talking about Holy Week, Palm Sunday. He said, "You know a couple years ago there was this rumor that the Shroud of Turin probably wasn't authentic, now all the evidence is pouring, past 18 months, it is authentic! Because they can't explain so many things again!" Now, you don't have to believe in the Shroud of Turin but can any of you envision the face on that shroud? Let's face it, I mean Roué, Rembrandt, and Raphael combined couldn't give you that face, that magnificent face. If he wasn't Jesus, he should have been! The cheekbones, the strength and yet the tenderness around the lips, the great serenity. Let's face it.

Anyhow, some of you are carrying crosses today that maybe nobody knows about, and the Church is certainly carrying the cross of scandal and disgust and you're getting wisecracks and sneers at work - I'm sure some of you are. But again, we come back, not to the priests, or the Pope, or the bishop or this loser or that saint - come back to Jesus! Jesus Christ! He said in the Gospels, "Take up your cross and follow me!" Not, "Be a good stoic! Grin and bear it, take your cross!" Uh uh. Christ says, "Take up your cross and follow me. There are two of us carrying this thing - I know how it feels." So you can take it with a little serenity and strength; you can say, "OK, let's face it."