

Homily of Palm Sunday, Year C, 2025

Luke 19:28-40; Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22:8-9, 17-20, 23-24; Philippians 2:6-11; Luke 22:14-23:56

Today, Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord, is the sixth and last Sunday of Lent. It commemorates the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem days before he was crucified. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week. The passion narrative from the Gospel of Luke invites us, once again, to participate step by step in the passion journey of Jesus Christ, which we began with the Stations of the Cross.

Almost all Jewish prophets prophesied the coming of the messiah who was to redeem Israel from her oppressors. At the time of Jesus, Israel was governed by the Romans. Jesus' disciples were convinced that Jesus was a political messiah who would lead a rebellion against the Roman colonial rule and drive out the Romans. For that reason, on arriving in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, he was given a rousing and heroic welcome. We read in today's gospel, "As he rode along, the people were spreading their cloaks on the road; and as he was approaching the slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of his disciples began to praise God aloud with joy for all the mighty deeds they had seen. They proclaimed: 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest'" (Luke 19:36-38).

John's Gospel is specific about palm branches: "They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna!' 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Blessed is the king of Israel!'" (John 12:13). The name 'Palm Sunday' is based on John's Gospel. Waving of palm branches is an expression of victory. 'Hosanna' is an Aramaic word which means, "save us now."

Palm leaves have more meanings. In some cultures, in times of crisis or misunderstanding, carrying palm leaves or presenting palm leaves is a gesture of peace and reconciliation. Today, the Church gives us palm leaves, a symbol of peace and reconciliation, to take to our homes and places. Let us share the message of peace and reconciliation with one another. You may take a palm leaf from this Mass to someone as a gesture of peace and reconciliation. In some cultures, palm leaves are used to identify sacred or secured or prohibited places or objects. Therefore, the palm leaves mean that in Jesus we are made sacred and secured. Jesus has placed his mark of prohibition on us against the evil one. However, the effectiveness of the prohibition or the lifting of the prohibition is determined by us. In Jesus we are, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, ... called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). Remaining in the wonderful light is determined by us.

Blessed palm leaves are not to be thrown around or discarded as trash. They are kept reverently until next year when they are returned to the church to be burned and the ashes are put on our forehead on Ash Wednesday.

I don't think that the people would have given Jesus such a rousing and heroic welcome if they knew he was not a political messiah. A few days later, the same crowd shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" I guess that the people were frustrated and disappointed that Jesus did not fulfill their expectation. If Jesus had overthrown the Roman leadership, everyone would have stood behind him. He would not have been crucified. Are we like the crowd? Do we get very disappointed, frustrated, and upset when our expectations are not met or when we fail to get what we want? Do we then become aggressive, destructive, or even murderous?

As we read in the gospel, Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a colt (a young donkey). Jesus chose to ride on a donkey instead of a horse. During Jesus' time, horse was the means of transportation for the rich, the high and the mighty, while donkey was the means of transportation for the poor. By riding on a donkey, Jesus identified himself with the poor and the lowly. By riding on a donkey, Jesus teaches us the importance of detachment and humility. Jesus says, "Learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29). Paul writes in

the second reading that although Jesus was God, he emptied himself of his God-ness to become a human being. "... he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8).

Jesus identified himself with a donkey, which is a beast of burden to fulfill Isaiah 53:54, "He took up our pain and bore our suffering." As donkeys carry loads, Jesus carries our pains and sufferings. Jesus is acting through us when we help to take up others' pains and bore others' sufferings.

Lastly, St. Andrew of Crete writes, "Let us imitate those who have gone out to meet him, not scattering olive branches or garments or palms in his path, but spreading ourselves before him as best as we can with humility of soul and upright purpose ... It is ourselves that we must spread under Christ's feet..."

Today's celebration becomes even more meaningful if Jesus makes a triumphal entry into our lives. May nothing prevent Jesus' entry into our lives. Amen.

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