

## Homily for Palm Sunday

Today we begin our journey through Holy Week. It begins with a celebration and an immense sense of anticipation and expectation. We heard the crowd shouting “Hosanna” to welcome Jesus into the city of Jerusalem, waving their palm branches and flocking to see Jesus.

Yet this will not last. By the end of today’s lengthy Gospel passage, Jesus is dead and is laid in a borrowed tomb.

But I have jumped ahead on what is already a roller coaster ... let us go back a few steps and chart all that happens. As they eat the Passover together, Jesus warns his disciples of the suffering that is to come. Jesus is prepared, and in his compassion, he tries to prepare his disciples to the best of his ability. In spite of everything he would have been feeling, his mind and his heart are with his disciples, and he had compassion for them as their teacher, guide and friend.

They miss the point for the moment ... again ... Jesus’ words fall on inattentive ears. Even as Jesus institutes the Eucharist, breaking bread and sharing wine with them, the disciples quickly turn to bickering over who among them is the greatest. Then, in the garden on the Mount of Olives, they cannot remain awake while Jesus prays, though their fatigue comes from sadness and grief as the realisation of what lies ahead is slowing dawning. May we remember that our own journey of faith will also have moments of weakness, but that God will never hold them against us. They are moments where we have an opportunity to reflect and grow in faith.

And then, Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested. Jesus will not tolerate violent resistance, and he is taken away. Peter tries to hang around, but he is questioned and denies knowing Jesus three times, as he was told that he would. Peter weeps bitterly, having his own moment of reflection.

After he speaks with Jesus, Pilate tries to acquit Jesus, but the crowd demands his crucifixion. Unable to free Jesus without facing considerable public and political backlash, Pilate condemns Jesus to death and they lead him away.

Jesus is crucified with two others. One mocks him, saying “save yourself and us!”, but the other admits his wrongdoing, declares Jesus’ innocence, and asks for forgiveness. “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” From the cross, this condemned criminal is able to seek the mercy and forgiveness of God. And it is granted. I have heard it said that the repentant thief is the ONLY person who is ever promised a place in paradise. Thanks be to God that God’s mercy redeems those who seek forgiveness, even in their final moments. May we take that depth of forgiveness to heart, and know ourselves the recipients of such grace from God.

Jesus’ death is a powerful moment of truth. The centurion declares Jesus’ innocence, and the crowd leaves distressed at the realisation that this was indeed true. Yet those who already knew this remain, “his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee” stand at a distance, and they will arrange for his burial. They are faithful, and also brave.

This Palm Sunday, I invite you to enter in to the whole emotional journey of Holy Week. Spend time as we recall the events from Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, to his death, and his resurrection. Sit prayerfully in the moments which disquiet you, because it is entirely appropriate that they do, and then, when we bask in the light and joy of the resurrection, revel in that good and wonderful news.

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