

Palm Sunday

Today the Church is celebrating Palm Sunday which is also known as Passion Sunday to commemorate the beginning of Holy Week and Jesus' final agonizing journey to the cross. The word passion comes from a Latin word *Passio* meaning "to suffer," and we meditatively go with the sufferings of Jesus. Here we have the rejoicing with the coming of Jesus and at the same time a reminder of his suffering that is to come in a short time. In the liturgical calendar Holy Week begins with the Sixth Sunday in Lent. Palm Sunday reminds the faithful of the glorious and triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. As Jesus entered Jerusalem the crowds greeted him with shouts of joy and proclaimed him as the messianic king and shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David" and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord".

The Gospels tell us that Jesus rode into the city on a donkey, as foretold by Prophet Zechariah, and in so doing emphasized the humility that was to characterize the Kingdom he proclaimed. In biblical times, the regional custom called for kings and nobles to arrive in a procession to ride on the back of a donkey. The donkey was a symbol of peace and those who rode upon them proclaimed peaceful intentions. The laying of palm branches indicated that the king or dignitary was arriving in victory or triumph.

In the present-day celebration, worshippers enact the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem by the waving of palm branches and singing songs of celebration. Sometimes this is accompanied by a procession into the church. The liturgical color for the Season of Lent is purple but in Catholic tradition, the colors are changed to Red for Palm Sunday. Red is the color of the church, used for Pentecost as well as remembering the martyrs of the church. Since it symbolizes the shedding of blood, it is also used on Palm Sunday to symbolize the death of Jesus. Increasingly, many churches are incorporating an emphasis on the Passion of Jesus into services on Palm Sunday as a way to balance the celebration of Easter Sunday.

The coming of the Lord to the city of Jerusalem is not something sad! It is the joy that is in all hearts, for the triumph of the Head, he who is the first among his brothers, necessarily reflects back upon all who are united to him and who, in him, are also sons of God, not by nature, but by adoption. When Christ is acclaimed and praised, the entire Church is glorified in him, for the Head and the Body are inseparable, a single and unique Mystery: that of the grace of God poured out upon the whole world for the salvation of all men! Each

day, every time we participate in the Eucharist, we repeat these same words: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

The Gospel of today gives us the passion narratives. The passion narrative has long been recognized as the most significant portion of the four Gospels. The reason is that the very core of Christian faith is expressed in these chapters: namely the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. In today’s passion narrative, Luke builds up to five basic events that take place during the last few days of the earthly life of Jesus. First is that Jesus shares his final meal with the disciples. Second, Jesus is arrested by his enemies. Third, Jesus is subjected to the so-called Jewish trial. Fourth, Jesus is subjected to the Roman trial and is condemned to death. Fifth, Jesus is crucified on the cross. He dies on the cross and is buried soon after.

In this passion narrative, we see the unfathomable love of God for us human persons shown in his beloved son Jesus. When we see the crucifix, we see the Son of God nailed hands and feet to that cross, slowly shedding his blood for us. The helplessness of the God-man was visible on the cross. In the face of those insults, Jesus had things to say. He did not say them only once. He went on repeating them. His words, “Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing”.

The Gospel tells us that as his death approached, there was darkness over the whole land. The powers of darkness were now approaching their moment of triumph. At that moment Jesus commends his soul to the Father. Into your hand, I commend my spirit was the prayer of Jesus taken from the psalm 31, taught by every Jewish mother to their children as the night prayer.

The liturgy of Palm Sunday, in the past two decades has been closely related to the celebration of the Youth Day. Pope Benedict XVI in his homily of 2006 Palm Sunday said that for 20 years, thanks to Pope John Paul II, Palm Sunday has become in a particular way the Day of Youth, the day that young people around the world go out to meet Christ, wishing to accompany him in their cities and countries so that he will be among us and be able to establish his peace in the world. The Pope stressed the three characteristics proclaimed by the church, poverty, peace, universality are summarized in the sign of the cross.