

PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD - B

March 25, 2018

TRIUMPHANT ENTRY TO JERUSALEM - John 12:12-16

A GREAT CROWD. A great crowd had come to the feast. They **TOOK** palm branches because they **HEARD** that **JESUS** was coming to the feast. Here, I would immediately recognize the effort on the part of the people to acclaim Jesus to be **KING**. They heard and acted appropriately upon what they heard. They used the palms that they brought to the city for the festival to acknowledge Christ's Kingship.

It would be helpful to know that palm trees did not grow in the mountainous region of Jerusalem. We could safely assume that people obtained them from the lowlands around the River Jordan precisely for the feast, but now were used to acknowledge Christ, the King.

While they were chanting Psalm 118 as part of the Festival's prayers, they shouted "***Hosanna***" which literally means "Save us, Lord, save us. Give us success, Lord" in verse 25.

I exhort you to look at this episode using the lens of your understanding of the mission of Jesus. It is interesting to note that what the people shouted (or better prayed) was truly a prayer that Jesus would help them.

Verse 26 of the same Psalm 118, continues: "***Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD: we bless you from the house of the LORD***".

Please allow me to ignite your interest in today's celebration by saying that, of the people who cried "***Blessed is the King of Israel who comes in the name of the Lord***" (John 12:13), there must have been some who hoped that Jesus was the One who would fulfil the *dreams* and expectations of Israel as Luke narrated in the resurrection episode on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:21).

Simeon certainly had been waiting for the 'consolation of Israel' and recognized the infant Jesus as 'a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel' (Luke 2:25-32).

We need to realize that the evangelist John has been emphasizing that Jesus' time had not yet come in several instances: in chapter 2, verse 4 at a wedding feast in Cana in Galilee; in chapter 7, verse 30 at the Temple when He was talking about His origin; and in chapter 8, verse 20, at the Temple right after He spared a woman caught in adultery - just a day after He talked about His origin.

But now, Jesus deliberately shows Himself. Why? Because the time has come. Yes, because finally **'the hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified'**.

The Lord Himself spoke about THE HOUR OF GLORY to the Greeks who wished to see Him, as we heard from the gospel of last Sunday (John 12: 23). A voice spoke from heaven: ***"I have glorified it (it refers to the name of the Father) and I will glorify it again"*** (John 12:28).

MASS

First Reading – Isaiah 50:4-7

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 22

Second Reading – Philippians 2:6-11

Gospel – Mark 14:1-15:47

My dear people of God:

Today's First Reading at Mass from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah portrays to us the Suffering Servant of God who completely trusts in God. This servant is a pre-figure of Jesus who was destined to teach, to console and to heal; but He will suffer too.

In the Second Reading Paul offers an illustration of the kind of humility to which he is exhorting the Philippians by pointing them to the condescension of Christ. The mindset of Christ is the "mindset" which believers are exhorted to emulate. Paul utilizes an already existent hymn to detail the humiliation of Christ. In verse six Paul describes how that although Christ preexisted in the "form of God," He did not regard His position as a highly prized possession. Paul tells us that although Christ was pre-existing in the form of God, He did not regard His equality with God to be "a highly prized possession" to hold onto.

On the contrary, Jesus considered His humanity as His prize, and so laid aside the conditions of His preexistent state, and became man”.

Paul describes the first of two successive actions of Christ in His humiliation. (1) The first action is explained by the phrase “He emptied Himself”. He gave up His environment of glory and took upon Himself limitations of place (space). Paul tells us that Christ was “taking the form of a servant” and “becoming in likeness of a man.” Christ emptied Himself by His assumption of human flesh with all of its limitations without shedding off His divinity.

(2) The second of two successive acts of Christ is His humiliation. Here we see His final step downward. He “humbled himself” to “death” But not just any death, even the “death on a cross”. This implies “voluntary humiliation”. This word shows “how the self-emptying manifests itself” by becoming Man. People of God: The Incarnation becomes a concrete historical event.

Paul describes the last step in Christ’s round trip journey *from glory to glory*, His exaltation by the Father. Christ’s voluntary humiliation is the basis for His high exaltation in verses. **“Exalted”** means **“to be raised to the loftiest height”**.

Likewise, the Father has given the Son the ***“name above every name.”*** Paul explains the purpose of God in giving Christ “the name above every name.” God’s purpose is that “every knee will bow” to the Lord Jesus. This universal authority extends to those “in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”

Paul is not merely teaching us that God’s desire is that “every knee should bow” and “every tongue should confess”, Paul is also declaring that God will most certainly carry this out. “The fulfillment of this divine intention will take place at the parousia”.

Now, let us go to the Gospel.

The Passion is God’s story that tells us again and again that we are loved, that we are precious, that we have infinite value and worth in God’s eyes. That story reaches its dramatic climax in the coming days as we follow the evangelist Mark’s account of our Lord’s Passion to its bitter end.

My dear people of God: We are familiar with the journey to the cross, a route that begins in the heights of the crowds’ adoration of Jesus during His triumphal entry and descends to the depths of His despair upon the cross.

We know that this story is for us. Jesus suffers, so that when we are suffering we know God understands and cares for us. Jesus is utterly alone by the end of the story so that when we feel alone we know God understands and is with us. Jesus cries out in despair so that when we become convinced the whole world has conspired against us and feel ready to give up, we know that God understands and holds on to us. Jesus dies so that we know God understands death and the fear of death and reminds us that death does not have the last word.

Let us be convinced that all that we see and hear, all that we read and sing, all of these are for us. The fourth century theologian Athanasius, speaking of the Incarnation said: *“Incarnation reaches its climax in the Crucifixion:”*. God becomes like us in Jesus so that we may become like God. The crucifixion is the exchange both where Jesus takes our sins and the consequent punishment with His righteousness and victory.

We proclaim the Word – this story continues, the story of God’s decision not to hold back and watch to see what we might do on our own but instead to get involved, to take matters into the Divine hands, to join God’s own self to us fully and completely so that we might live and die – and live again! – in hope and courage. That’s the story we tell, the story of this week’s dramatic reading, the story of God’s passionate and relentless quest to redeem all of us in love.

Please be aware that in this Liturgical Year B, we are reading Mark’s account of the Lord’s Passion. Mark said that the disciples came, saying, *“Where do you want us to prepare the Passover?”* They meant, “at what house?”. He said, *“Go into the city to such a man bearing a pitcher of water”*. This person He ordered them to follow, without saying anything to him, because as he was carrying the water home he would lead them straight to his master’s house, with which, it seems, the disciples were not acquainted. This direction (and some others that were mentioned in Mark 14:14-15; Luke 22:11-12), were given by Jesus to His disciples, and these predictions were uttered to show them how completely He foreknew everything that should befall Him. All of these were meant to convince them that His sufferings were all predetermined by God; and that, on His part, He submitted Himself to these sufferings voluntarily.

The disciples did as Jesus had appointed — and found everything to happen exactly as Jesus had foretold, which doubtless would tend no little to confirm their faith in him, and prepare them for the trial they would so soon have to pass through.

Jesus was in full command in the unfolding of His Supernatural plans at work in His disciples: the man carrying the jar of water and the minute details surrounding the discovery by the Apostles that all that Jesus said and instructed were fulfilled. This seems to be another miracle of Jesus; one that happened at the end time of His Ministry on earth. Brothers and sisters, this is the point that I want to drive home at this year's celebration of Palm Sunday: the presence of the man carrying the water jar.

Even if Jesus prearranged the man with the water jar to be there, the odds of the two disciples encountering him at the right moment are astronomical given the fact that the city was full of pilgrims. This is God's Supernatural Miracle Power at work. This is even more intriguing considering the fact that despite Jesus' impending trauma and adversity, He still puts others first by ensuring they celebrate and participate in the Passover. Please know that in most Middle Eastern cultures, most men do not carry water on the head or cook a meal. The two chosen disciples join the man to prepare the Passover meal. They did everything as instructed by Jesus so that they had the Passover Meal.

It was an extremely rare act. Middle Easterners would frown at it as a feminine act. Yet this "jar carrying man" who probably drew some scorn from his neighbors, led the disciples to the Upper Room. It should not surprise us anymore that Jesus would utilize a man in such a particular (I say peculiar) situation.

At this point, brothers and sisters, I would love to point out that *"He who created all things, whether visible or invisible, and by whom all things were upheld, should so empty Himself as not to be the proprietor of a single house in His whole creation, to eat the last Passover with His disciples"*

This man who didn't worry about what was "woman's work" or a "manly job" is a beautiful image to remind us that God appreciates every gesture of ours (no matter how lowly) that is meant for the celebration of LIFE from GOD. God envisions a world where the purpose of life isn't defeated by the status, gender, education, orientation, or race of the person.

Where did the man carrying the water jar lead them? To the upper room of the Last Supper, to the chance to share in the bread, the cup, and the future of the faith. He led them to the Passover feast, where teacher and students, shepherd and sheep, betrayer and betrayed all ate together. When we let go of our preconceived notions of who does what, we embrace service with our full hearts

and we lead others to the upper room of faith. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is described frequently as “water to the thirsty”. Are we willing to carry the water jar? Amen

Have a Blessed Holy Week.