

Palm Sunday 5th April 2020

Readings:

Liturgy of the Palms

Psalm 118; 1-2, 19-29

Matthew 21:1-11

Liturgy of the Passion

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Phil.2:9-11

Matthew 26:14 - 27:66

Collect

God of kings and criminals:

your ways are not our ways.

On the way to Jerusalem, with shouts we acclaimed you;

on the way to Calvary, with shouts we condemned you.

Mercifully grant us the way that leads to life,

For you are alive and reign with the Father

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. Amen

Reflection

What an incredibly strange Palm Sunday we face this year. How shall we mark and live this Holy Week like no other? We have been stripped of the outer container that holds the mystery. Liturgy, ritual and symbol together with communal fellowship are denied us. At a time when our senses are normally awash with seasonal colour, music, procession, touch - instead, we face physical isolation and uncertainty.

I was so very grateful to receive three small palm crosses in the mail this week – lovingly made by a parishioner. They have now been duly blessed in the context of a simple Palm Sunday liturgy and solo reading of St. Matthew's Passion in my living room.



Yet the removal of the familiar often allows something new to emerge. I've heard of some folk planning to chalk palm branches, cross and empty tomb on their footpath while others may mount a stark cross in their garden or in their street-facing window, then decorating it on Easter Day. But perhaps we are also invited to wait upon something new – to be attentive to, and reflect on, The Paschal Mystery in our current extraordinary context. After all, that first Palm Sunday heralded an unimaginable expression of the true nature of God.

We call it Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem – a grand parade, an enthusiastic crowd singing 'Hosannas' and waving palm branches. There is a heightened sense of expectation and longing for the promised Messiah who will deliver the Jewish people from their current problems of Roman governance. (But the 'triumph' is not to be what they expected.)

So today, we join Jesus on a humble donkey, just outside Jerusalem. The parade is about to begin. But did you know that there were two parades in the Holy City that day?ⁱ On the other side of town Pontius Pilate was entering Jerusalem – coming in from the coast with 600 foot-soldiers, horses, armour, banners and flags and standards bearing great carved golden eagles (the symbol of Roman authority), beating drums, the cadence of heavy foot-fall.... Jerusalem during Passover would have been teeming with Jewish pilgrims and been a hotbed of tension – and Rome wanted Israel to be in no doubt about who was in charge.

And the cheers would have been eerily similar to the ones we think of when we remember Palm Sunday: Caesar was Rome's 'Prince of Peace'; Caesar was Rome's 'Son of God', and Pontius Pilate was his representative. And then came Jesus, down the Mount of Olives on a donkey; on an 'agricultural tool', not a war machine. The imagery couldn't have been clearer 'I am for peace!' This triumphal entry was a send-up, a parody of Pilate's grand procession – a mockery of it. It wasn't an accident it was a staged demonstration.

‘So what?’ some might say. ‘So what if there were two parades – what does that matter?’

Well, I think it matters, because there are always two parades...and we have a choice as to which one we join.

When we choose how we live during our Level 4 national emergency...remaining in isolation, practicing patience and kindness - or not...we walk a certain way.

When we choose to forgive – or not...we walk a certain way.

When we choose what we’ll do with our money, our energy, our love...we walk a certain way.

When we choose to be open to new ways of living on this planet earth...we walk a certain way.

When we choose to wait, attentive to what God is doing in our time and place....we walk a certain way.

Whenever we stand in the footsteps of those who have protested for peace, justice, freedom, climate action, we are choosing which parade we are joining...

There are always two parades in town...and the ever-present question is:

‘Which one will you join?’

May this Holy Week enliven our hearts and enlighten our minds as we join Jesus on the Way of the Cross.....

ⁱ Borg, Marcus J. and Crosson, John Dominic. *Step Gently in the World, The Last Week*, pp10,11(adapted). Harper Collins