

PALM SUNDAY (April 17, 2011) IS 50:4-7; PHIL 2:6-11; MT: 21: 1-11 & 27:11-54

The Church celebrates today as both Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. It is on Palm Sunday that we enter Holy Week, welcoming Jesus into our lives, asking him to allow us a share in his suffering, death and resurrection. This is the time of the year when we stop to remember and relive the events which brought about our redemption and salvation. The Holy Week liturgies present us with the actual events of the dying and rising of Jesus. These liturgies enable us to experience in our lives here and now what Jesus went through then. In other words, what we commemorate and relive during this week is not just Jesus' dying and rising, but our own dying and rising in Him, which result in our healing, reconciliation, and redemption. Proper participation in the Holy Week liturgies will also deepen our relationship with God, increase our faith and strengthen our lives as disciples of Jesus.

The first part of today's gospel describes the royal reception which Jesus received from his admirers, who paraded with him for a distance of two miles: from the Mount of Olives to the city of Jerusalem. Two-and-a-half million people were normally present to celebrate the Jewish feast of Passover. Jesus permitted such a royal procession for two reasons: 1) to reveal to the general public that he was the promised Messiah, and 2) to fulfill the prophecies of Zechariah (9:9) and Zephaniah (3: 16-19): "Rejoice heart and soul, daughter of Zion.... see now your king comes to you; he is victorious, triumphant, humble and riding on a donkey..." (Zech. 9:9). (The traditional "Palm Sunday Procession" at Jerusalem began in the fourth century A.D. when the bishop of Jerusalem led the procession from the Mount of Olives to the Church of the Ascension). In the second part of today's gospel, we listen to the Passion of Christ according to Matthew. We are challenged to examine our own lives in the light of some of the characters in the story like Peter who denied Jesus, Judas who betrayed Jesus, Pilate who acted against his conscience, Herod who ridiculed Jesus, and the leaders of the people who preserved their position by getting rid of Jesus.

Am I ready to surrender my life to Him during this Holy Week and welcome him into all areas of my life as my Lord and Savior, singing "hosanna"? Today, we receive palm branches at the Divine Liturgy. Let us take them to our homes and put them some place where we can always see them. Let the palms remind us that Christ is the king of our families, that Christ is the king of our hearts, that Christ is the only true answer to our quest for happiness and meaning in our lives. And if we do proclaim Christ as our king, let us try to make time for Him in our daily life; let us be reminded that He is the one with whom we will be spending eternity. Let us be reminded further that our careers, our education, our finances, our homes, all of the basic material needs in our lives are only temporary. Let us prioritize and place Christ the king as the primary concern in our lives. It is only when we have done this that we will find true peace and happiness in our confused and complex world.

Joke of the week: Little Johnny was sick on Palm Sunday and stayed home from church with his mother. His father returned from church holding a palm branch. The little boy was curious and asked, "Why do you have that palm branch, dad?" "You see, when Jesus came into town, everyone waved palm branches to honor him; so we got palm branches today." "Aw, shucks," grumbled Little Johnny. "The one Sunday I can't go to church, and Jesus shows up!"

(Taken from the Scriptural Homilies)