

PALM SUNDAY

Today we begin Holy Week. In ancient times this was known as the Great Week. The Passion narratives come to life as if enacted before our very eyes. Step by step we follow the path Christ trod during the last days of His mortal life.

Like the people of Jerusalem, we too joyfully acclaim Christ as our King. He enters the Holy City not as a warrior King with a great army, but as a humble and gentle Messiah 'humble and riding on a donkey' (Zachariah 9:19). The donkey was regarded as a beast of burden. Christ, as it were, does the 'donkey work' for us. He takes upon Himself the burden and guilt of our sins and carries them in His sacred Passion. It is also worth noting that in ancient times it was customary for a King to ride on a donkey when on a mission of peace whereas the horse carried Kings into battle. In this sense Christ, the King will bring peace to those who make a place for him in their hearts and follow Him with humility. His is also a Kingdom of Truth and 'all who are on the side of Truth listen to His voice'.

The procession of palms is not just pageantry - we follow Christ with a lively devotion. Even today the triumph of Easter is foreshadowed - the palm being an emblem of victory. The Book of Revelation tells us that the saints in Heaven hold palm branches in their hands. So we don't just look back at a past event. Our humble prayer at the beginning of Mass is that, when our life on Earth is over we 'may follow Christ into the new and everlasting Jerusalem of Heaven.'

The First Reading speaks about a *Suffering Servant in the Book of Isaiah (50: 4-7)*. *The suffering of this mysterious person in the Old Testament prefigures those of Christ. The humility of Christ in accepting insult and derision is brought out in the second Reading. It speaks about His self emptying. He assumed the condition of a slave.*

The Gospel this year is the story of the Passion from Luke - it never fails to make a deep impression. We enter into the story and can imagine ourselves on Mount Calvary witnessing the saga of Christ's suffering and death for ourselves.

After the long Gospel a little reflection similar to what's below can be made.

The question is: If I was on Calvary that day, where would my loyalties lie? What would my reaction be to what was taking place? The answer is: where do I stand now? If I am stuck 'in the rut of sin' and am not doing anything about it, then I will keep my distance from the Cross of Jesus. It says that many people among the onlookers 'went home beating their breasts'. Do I believe that I had a part to play in putting Jesus on the Cross? He died to take my sins away but only if I acknowledge and am sorry for them. Does his message find a real home in my heart? Or am I like most of the crowd on Calvary, witnessing an event which won't make that much difference to the way I live. Do I feel that Christ died for me personally, so much does he love me? God did not spare his own Son but gave him up to benefit us all. He will not refuse his grace to those who seek it.

(Mention about Pilate, Barabbas, Peter)