

PALM SUNDAY

A Reflection after the blessing of Palms. (I don't normally give a homily after the Reading of the Passion)

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. In the book of Isaiah it says that God has burdened Him with the sins of all of us. "**Ours were the sufferings he bore, ours were the sorrows he carried.**" It is also worth noting that at the time of our Lord it was customary for a King to ride on a donkey if he was on a **mission of peace** whereas the horse usually carried those going to war. In this sense Christ, the King will bring peace to all those who give **pride of place** to him in their hearts.

The procession of palms is not just pageantry - we take part in it with a lively faith and devotion. Even today **the triumph of Easter is foreshadowed** - the palm being an emblem of that 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. *'May we when our life's journey is over 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 sufferings of this mysterious individual in the Old Testament **prefigure those of Christ**. His humility in accepting insult and derision is brought out in the second Reading. This is part of His self-emptying. He assumed the condition of a slave.

The Gospel this year is the story of the **Passion from Matthew** - it never fails to make a deep impression. If we were part of the crowd that Good Friday would we have went along with the hostile crowd, or be among the faithful few who stood by Jesus to the end or be merely detached bystanders, there for the spectacle? The answer to that question will be answered by another: "Where do we stand now". Do we remain faithful to Jesus through all the twists and turns of our lives? Shouldering the cross in union with Jesus means persevering in love against all the

odds. If we remain steadfast, the Cross will be our stepping stone to glory.

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