

PALM SUNDAY

A Reflection after the blessing of Palms.

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 make a place for him in their hearts. His is also a Kingdom of Truth and as Jesus said to Pilate 'all who are on the side of Truth listen to my voice'.

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. Our humble prayer is that 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 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 and even more so in the Gospel where he was mocked, jeered, spat upon, punched, made fun of, flogged, crowned with sharp thorns and branded as a blasphemer. Accepting all this with humility and for our sakes is at the heart of His self-emptying. He assumed the condition of a slave.

The Gospel this year is the story of the Passion from Mark - it never fails to make a deep impression.

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