

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion – March 25, 2018 – Good Shepherd Parish

Gospel for Blessing of Palms: Mark 11:1-10

When Jesus and his disciples drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately on entering it, you will find a colt tethered on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone should say to you, 'Why are you doing this?' reply, 'The Master has need of it and will send it back here at once.'" So they went off and found a colt tethered at a gate outside on the street, and they untied it. Some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They answered them just as Jesus had told them to, and they permitted them to do it. So they brought the colt to Jesus and put their cloaks over it. And he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. Those preceding him as well as those following kept crying out:

"Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is to come!

Hosanna in the highest!"

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7

The Lord God has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them. Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear; and I have not rebelled, have not turned back. I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting. The Lord GOD is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.

Psalm: Ps 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24

R. (2a) My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

All who see me scoff at me;
they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads:

"He relied on the LORD; let him deliver him,
let him rescue him, if he loves him."

Indeed, many dogs surround me,
a pack of evildoers closes in upon me;
they have pierced my hands and my feet;
I can count all my bones.

They divide my garments among them,
and for my vesture they cast lots.
But you, O LORD, be not far from me;
O my help, hasten to aid me.

I will proclaim your name to my brethren;
in the midst of the assembly I will praise you:
"You who fear the LORD, praise him;
all you descendants of Jacob, give glory to him;
revere him, all you descendants of Israel!"

Scripture Reading: Philippians 2:6-11

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Gospel: Mark 14:1-15:47



Lenten Prayer

O God, bless us during this season
of spiritual renewal. Fill our minds and hearts
with love, that we may be a sign of Jesus to all
those living in our midst.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

“Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion” has two main sections, which present a jarring contrast. Often we do not notice this, because the first is so short. Let us look. (1) Jesus as King: First the presider blesses the palms, and then processes with them into church. Many of us have thought of this important moment simply as an addition to the regular mass. But it is much more. First, an extra Gospel is read during this time. It depicts Jesus as a King. He rides an animal that was always used for the entrance of royalty into a city: a colt, or as translations often have it, “a donkey.” The disciples spread cloaks on the animal's back, while crowds along the way lay their cloaks onto the roadway. They strew palm branches out in order to soften the kingly person's way. “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”! Jesus is being portrayed as the true king of our lives! Priest and ministers process into the church and to the altar, which can be seen as a commemoration of Christ's entrance to Jerusalem.

(2) Jesus as Slave: Now the Mass begins. For its Gospel we hear the Passion Reading according to Mark. We feel the jarring contrast. Soldiers are ridiculing the so-called king, shouting in their rough voices the equivalent of “You fool, you think you are the King of the Jews”! They are not praising him, as the people had along the way, but ridiculing this poor, outlandish captive. They jam a mocking crown on his head. “King, are you”? They wrap a fake purple robe around his wounds—the color usually reserved for rulers. They cackle like clowns and they spit on him. What a kingdom this had turned out to be! Why would the King of Kings allow such degradation to take place?

Look to the First Reading. *I did not refuse, did not turn away. I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who tore out my beard. My face I did not hide from insults and spitting. (Isaiah 50:6)* These words, written centuries before the New Testament, seem to depict a passive surrender. Would this have been appropriate for a king? You or I would have shouted, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me”? The Responsorial Psalm says exactly these words. Jesus will say them from the cross. Are they words of a king? Look to the Second Reading. It gives a deep reflection on this question. It is the famous passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians, Chapter 2. Jesus did not regard being equal to God as something to cling to—for safety or for honor or for whatever other reason. God would exalt him later. He would give himself for the sake of others, no matter what it cost. He was to become like a slave, obedient even to death on the cross. This is a complete opposite of kingliness as we think of it. For our televised, pleasure seeking world, it is like a mockery of kingship. But would we rather have had a self-centered ruler, one who looked out for himself only, while claiming to do everything for the people? We can understand self-interest, but we hope against hope for someone who will take our side, no matter what it costs. Jesus is that true leader. He lets go of everything in allegiance to God and in service of the people. Let us be silent.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. “Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear.” St. Ignatius experienced extended “communications from God.” But he also learned to distinguish between those from God and those from elsewhere. Have you ever made a retreat and begun to learn such distinctions?
2. “*Agape*” love is selfless and free from self-concern and self-preoccupation. It includes conversion, vulnerability, search for justice, and suffering. Explain Jesus' love for us in terms of *agape*. How does it help redeem the world?
3. The woman in this passion reading was “wasting” expensive perfumed oil on Jesus. Does this relate to God's self-wasting love on humankind? How is the Eucharist a continuation of Christ's self-giving love for us? Does your busy schedule allow time to “waste” on love?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Almighty ever-living God, who as an example of humility for the human race to follow caused our Savior to take flesh and submit to the Cross, graciously grant that we may heed his lesson of patient suffering and so merit a share in his Resurrection. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen