

Palm Sunday Year C  
April 10, 2022

What a splendid occasion it must have been for those who had been drawn to Jesus of Nazareth. Their Rabbi riding triumphantly into the holy city of Jerusalem. Women, men, and children, waving palm branches, signs of victory, shouting, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Perhaps this triumphant entry did not make an impact on the entire city. After all, these were festival days in Jerusalem. The entire city would have been packed with visitors from around the Roman Empire. This spontaneous moment out on the Mount of Olives would have seen like a ripple in the great tide of celebration sweeping Jerusalem at the time.

But for those who stood by the side of the road watching as this carpenter from Nazareth entered the city, well they must have sensed that something extraordinary was about to happen. So they scattered those signs of victory before him and shouted, "Hosanna in the highest!"

Of course, over two thousand years have gone by since Jesus made his way through those city streets. It is easy for us who have heard this story so many times before to become complacent. "Oh yeah, it's Palm Sunday. I wonder what's for dinner?" My friends, we need to work hard today. We need to stretch our hearts, our minds, and our imaginations in order to truly remember what this moment was and is truly all about.

Let's look to the passage from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians for assistance.

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Jesus Christ who, though was in the form of God..."

That young man riding on the back of a donkey was much more than a teacher and worker of miracles, good with a parable and compassionate toward those in need. St. Paul is reminding us that he was none other than God's Son. In him, as best as flesh and blood will allow, was all that God is, made incarnate and made manifest for a brief moment in history. The divine power within him transcended all the earthly, military, technological, medical, intellectual, economic, and political power that our world has ever known. Satan knew this back in the time of the wilderness temptation. Jesus already had it all. And yet, for the sake of the world, for your sake and mine, he was prepared to give it all up. Even when rejected, even when despised, tortured, entirely abandoned by those who claimed to love him most, and executed, he was prepared to give it all up.

As Paul writes, “Though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born of human likeness. And being in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.

The artist Rembrandt was once asked, “What was the hardest thing for you to ever have to paint? He answered that it was the wounds of the crucifixion in the hands, feet, and side of Jesus. He said that he had been overwhelmed, upon imagining those wounds, how much the Son of God had loved us. Later in his career, when Rembrandt had the occasion to again paint the scene of the crucifixion, he painted his own face into the crowd. It was his way of acknowledging that the one who had it all from the beginning had given it all up in the name of love.

How will we acknowledge that love in our own lives?

Of course, as we have heard, the triumphal entry was only the prelude. From those cheers of “Hosanna”, we move all too quickly to the passion and the cross. And there, on the cross, Jesus through his love changes it all. From the Christian perspective, this death and all that follows is **THE MOST IMPORTANT MOMENT** in human history. St. Paul writes it this way:

“Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

What we remember today is that, in the great mystery of God, when Jesus gave up his life, nailed to a cross of wood like a common thief, the old world enslaved to sin and death was defeated. New life, and a new world order, had begun.

Which brings me to one last point. Today, Jesus is offering all of that he has accomplished to you and to me. Truly understood, every prayer ever offered, every hymn ever sung, every liturgy ever celebrated, every stone ever used to build a church, depends upon and points to this our greatest hope – that in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God’s love revealed in him has prevailed and we are reconciled to God and thus with one another.

Jesus had it all. He gave it all up. By doing so, he changed it all. And now he offers it all to us. Let’s stay with him in these coming days of Holy Week to see where it all leads. Amen.