

Sunday 13th April 2025

Palm Sunday

Gospel Reading

Luke 19.28-40

Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

²⁸ After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

²⁹ When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" just say this: "The Lord needs it.'" ³² So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' ³⁴ They said, 'The Lord needs it.' ³⁵ Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸ saying,

'Blessed is the king

who comes in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven,

and glory in the highest heaven!'

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.'⁴⁰ He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.'

Other Readings: Psalm 118.1-2,19-29

Homily

In many, perhaps most, of our parishes this morning there will be two gospel readings. The Palm Gospel will remind us of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday. The Passion Gospel will look ahead to the events that followed it.

The church will reflect further on these events through this Holy Week. On Thursday, we will remember Jesus' last meal with his disciples when he knelt to wash their feet, instituted the Holy Communion and gave them the great commandment to 'love one another as I have loved you'. On Friday, we will remember Jesus' agony and death on the cross. Throughout, we will follow 'the way of the cross'.

The pictures we get when we look at these two different Gospels could scarcely be more different. The Palm Gospel is a story of triumph, a popular hero acclaimed by the crowds comes to claim his own. If the people are silenced, the stones will sing. The Passion Gospel is a story of defeat, a would-be Messiah arrested, tortured, tried, convicted and executed.

Of course, we know that there's more to it than that. We know that the triumph of Palm Sunday was only a step on a journey. We know that the crowds were fickle, that their cheers would quickly turn to jeers, their shouts of 'Hosanna' turn to 'Crucify Him!' And, most importantly, we know that death on Friday was turned to victory on Sunday, that Jesus rose again, victorious over sin and death and offering us all a share in his resurrection life.

We do know that, and yet...

Sometimes we forget what all this means for how we judge what is good and what is not in the life of faith. Let me explain what I mean.

If we think that what matters is being popular with lots of people, then we will strive to remain with the Palm Gospel and avoid the Passion Gospel. If we think that being successful in worldly terms, whether that's being powerful or rich, or influential on social media, we will follow Jesus only as far as Palm Sunday and then, like the crowds, turn away. If we think that churches can measure their effectiveness in mission by counting up the number of people who attend them, without ever asking whether there is anything more to following Jesus than that, then we will get stuck by the roadside, waving our Palms, and risk missing the Gospel altogether.

Imagine if Jesus had thought that way. Imagine if Jesus had thought on that first Palm Sunday, 'I've really made it now. Let's try to kick on from here and build a properly successful operation.' Imagine if later in the week he'd thought, 'All those fans are deserting me. I must be doing something wrong.' Or if on that horrible Thursday evening he'd prayed 'Take this cup away from me' and missed out the words 'not my will be done, but yours.'

The Palm Gospel and the Passion Gospel are *both* important – we can't have one without the other. But this Palm Sunday let's face the challenge squarely. Are we Palm Gospel Christians? Are we comfortable with the triumph, the popularity, the cheering and the singing and the celebration, but uneasy with the suffering, the sadness and the sacrifice of the Passion Gospel? Will we skip Holy Week in all its solemnity and only come back to church on Easter Sunday when 'everything's all right' again?

And what of the church itself? Are we a church that wants success more than it wants to serve? That believes that popularity is more important than prayerfulness?

Jesus did not cling to popularity – in the end he was willing to face the most intense isolation and loneliness anyone has ever known as he cried out 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

So let's be Passion Gospel Christians, too. Let's remember, and follow, and reflect on the suffering and sacrifice of Our Lord in these coming days and be thankful. And let's try to be like those few, those very few of his followers who made it all the way to the foot of the cross and heard in that place of unmatched cruelty those words of inestimable comfort, 'Father, forgive.'

Conversation Questions

1. Is it a good idea to have the Palm Gospel and the Passion Gospel on the same day? Why? Why not?
2. How can you follow in the way of the cross in the coming week?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

*Almighty and everlasting God,
who in your tender love towards the human race
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
to take upon him our flesh
and to suffer death upon the cross:
grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

(or)

*True and humble king,
hailed by the crowd as Messiah:
grant us the faith to know you and love you,
that we may be found beside you
on the way of the cross,
which is the path of glory.*

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