

PALM SUNDAY – MATTHEW 27: 11-54

The naming of this Sunday is confusing for some people. It is given two names on the church calendar. The more popular name is Palm Sunday. The mood of the day with the procession that we have just re-enacted emphasizes this theme of rejoicing with palm branches, and jubilant music.

And so today we have re-enacted the journey that our Lord took towards Jerusalem, of the welcoming crowds, and of how they waved palm branches and cheered him along, crying Hosanna, Hosanna in the Highest, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,

Today is the day when the church also begins the drama that culminates on Easter Sunday. The second name for this Sunday is called the Passion of our Lord, with the colours in the church being Red to symbolize the Passion.

We have journeyed through the 40 days of Lent and hopefully we have been led through a wilderness experience that has helped to enliven our faith. The readings quickly go from being triumphant to the week of telling about our Lord's suffering, or passion.

This week comes to its conclusion Thursday, in the celebration of Jesus' last supper with his disciples; then Friday, with Jesus' crucifixion and burial, and Saturday, with our Lord's body in the tomb. So we call this day Passion Sunday, because it begins the week of such dramatic, sorrowful events.

The journey now becomes tumultuous. We are on an unbelievable pace, which takes us through the whole gamut of emotional response. There is the joy of the triumphant ride of Jesus into Jerusalem.

Swept along with the disciples and friends of Jesus we cheer him on shouting Hosanna. People cast their cloaks down before the donkey, on which he rode and waved palm branches that they had torn off the palm trees before him.

The palm tree was believed by many to be the tree of Life in Eden - symbols of joy and hope and of life. This was a festive entry into the city, yet already this "king is strange".

He comes not as a warrior but riding on a donkey, a beast of abject humility. We know that he struggles in the Garden of Gethsemane with what he has ahead of him and he has to contend with friends who betray, deny and ultimately desert him.

We read of his friends, the fickle hostility of the crowd, the impatient demands of the political leaders and the mocking sadism of the military. We hear the crowd cry "Crucify him, crucify him."

Jesus carries his own cross until he can carry it no longer and then Simone of Syrene carries it to the final place where Jesus will die. Can we hear that story and not place

ourselves somewhere in it? Would we have been a part of that jeering crowd? Or would we have taken to the hills like the fearful disciples?

Would we have helped carry the cross through the jostling crowds? Would we have questioned what kind of a loving God could allow such a thing to happen?

No matter where we see ourselves the journey leads in one direction only, and that is to the foot of the cross. As Christians we cannot ignore it. God wants to reveal to us that Jesus' death on the cross is the way to glory.

In fact the irony of life is that it is only through dying that we are given the secret of truly being alive. Death followed by resurrection, life through dying, is the way things are. It is not a truth limited to the one event of Christ's death and resurrection, although that is the prototype for the Christian.

It does not affect us only when we approach the end of our lives. It is a principle of all existence; when we do the necessary dying, then we come to a fuller richer quality of living.

Where is the cross taking us today? It is leading us to Maundy Thursday where we will re-enact the Lord's Supper, where we will strip the altar and the church will be in mourning for our Lord. It will take us to the foot of the cross on Good Friday.

We can view the cross in two different ways, it can be the greatest of failures or we can recognize and be convinced of god's great love and compassion for humanity.

In that death, God suffered and died. That is the measure of God's love. Can we understand the love behind the cross? Can we take it and transform it into a thing of loveliness and glory that inspires us and others to take up that cross and follow those steps?

Can we understand the measure of God's love and know the meaning of that love in our lives? For in dying Jesus showed us God's glory and passionate love. There was no other way. There is no other way but the way of the cross. The parade today begins that journey.

I pray that you will all follow the path this week and attend the Holy Week services which will end in the greatest gift of all: the Risen Saviour of the World, Jesus Christ. Amen.