

Palmarum / Palm Sunday

Matthew 21:1-9; 26:36-27:66

April 4 – 5, 2009

In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zechariah 9:9)

Today is Palm Sunday. Jesus rides into His own city as the Son of David and the Son of God—the Son of David by the substance and flesh of His mother, and the Son of God, begotten before the worlds, of the substance of His Father. Today we celebrate Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem and so we embark on the holiest journey in the holiest week of the Church year—the week of our Lord’s Passion. The Prince of Peace rides into the City of Peace, for that is what Jerusalem means, **“City of Peace.”** But there, Jesus will find no peace, only death. And there, in His death, is found our only peace.

On the face of it, it seems Jesus is making an insane attempt to commit suicide. He is riding into Jerusalem to die. That is His plan. He announced His upcoming demise no less than three times before riding into Jerusalem. He spoke of His exodus with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. And even after entering Jerusalem He continued to talk about His coming death, and He even said that He would be delivered up to be crucified. (Matthew 26:2)

So what was Jesus doing? What possibly could He have been thinking? The answer to that question may surprise you just a little bit. He was thinking of you. Yes, He was thinking of you and every sinner that ever has been, or ever will be. Jesus rides into Jerusalem where they kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to her, because He knows what it will take to free you from yourself, and from Satan, and from the grave. He knows that He must die. It is not the desire to die, which drives Jesus on into Jerusalem and certain death, it is love. More specifically, it is His love for you.

This is the week of Jesus’ Passion. But, in this context the word passion does not hold the same meaning that it has come to hold in our contemporary, worldly, context. It is not the sweaty, pornographic, lust of Hollywood and TV, or cheap magazines and novels. It is not boundless enthusiasm for a pastime, hobby, or food. Jesus didn’t have a passion to be crucified like I have a passion for hunting and travel, or you have a passion for ice cream or chocolate. Nor, in this context, does the word passion, imply the

emotions we might feel as we contemplate the events of Holy Week. Jesus' suffering and death are called His "**Passion**" because it is His overwhelming love and His obsession to save you that drove Him to His Cross. So, it is that, when we Christians use the word, "**Passion,**" in reference to Christ, we are not simply referring to Jesus' suffering and death alone, but we also refer to that which drove Him to the Cross: a love so intense that it would not let go of you at any cost. Jesus' "**Passion**" is a love so great that He gave up everything, even life, to make you His brother or sister, a fellow child of God. That is the Passion of the Christ.

So Jesus rides into His own city to pay the price you cannot. He rides into Jerusalem to set the captives free, captives who hate and revile Him. He comes to the Passover to be your Blood Sacrifice, once, for all. He is the Lamb who was slain, whose Blood sets you free to be people of God. He is roasted in God's fiery wrath. His flesh is to be eaten by all in the house. His Blood is painted on the doorposts and lintels of your heart by way of your tongue and death passes over you.

Jesus rides into His own city to place His finger on your dumb tongue, His gentle hand upon your deaf ears, to speak His absolution and cure you of your leprous sin. He rides to save those who betray Him, to save those who cannot stay awake with Him, even one hour. Therefore, cast your dirty garment at His feet that He might trample it in His Passion. Give to Him your robe of indifference and apathy, the robe that binds you with bands of excuses and enfolds you in selfishness, the robe that veils, muffles, and suffocates your love for your neighbor, your Church, and your God. Throw down before Him your greed, your lust, your hate, your suffering, your pain, your loneliness, your despair. Place before Him your filthy works and receive from Him His garment of righteousness washed white in the Blood of His Passion.

Jesus rides into His own city to die your death, not because you deserve it; you are not somehow worthy of His love. But He loves you nonetheless. He rides to give you the name Barabbas, which means, "**Son of the Father.**" For you are to be set free. Jesus is to die in Your place. You are to be pardoned though you are guilty, while the innocent Christ suffers your shame, your pain, your guilt, your death. Jesus rides to restore that which has been broken by the sin of one man, Adam, and through whom sin and death entered the world. "**For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.**" (1 Corinthians 15:22)

Jesus still rides, even this day. He rides into this very nave on the most noble of steeds hidden in humble Word, water, bread, and wine. This is His gift of life for you, because in these, we receive the forgiveness of sin and the bestowing and strengthening of our faith in Him. In these, He bequeaths to us His last will and testament, established in His innocent suffering and death, written in His Blood, and made firm in His resurrection. With these gifts, He sustains us in this life, making us ready for the eternal life with Him to come.

So now we embark upon our holiest week, our most solemn celebration. We remember the Passion of the Christ. We remember that His Passion was His love for us and we remember all that He was willing to endure for us. This is a celebration, solemn yes, but a celebration nonetheless. No one took Jesus' life from Him, He died willing, and then took up His life again to save you and me and all creation. This week we commemorate the institution of the New Testament in Jesus' Blood, the destruction of Hell and all its power over us in Jesus' holy death, and the vindication of His Kingship on the day of His resurrection.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation.” (Zechariah 9:9)
“Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord. The King of Israel” (John 12:13)
Yes, rejoice greatly, because Jesus, your King, is coming to tell you, **“I forgive you all your sins.”**

In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.