

Homily for Palm Sunday Mass in St. Peter's Square

Pope Francis' homily at the Mass for Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord on 20 March 2016.

03/21/2016

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” (cf. *Lk* 19:38), the crowd of Jerusalem exclaimed joyfully as they welcomed Jesus. We have made that enthusiasm our own: by waving our olive and palm

branches we have expressed our praise and our joy, our desire to receive Jesus who comes to us. Just as he entered Jerusalem, so he desires to enter our cities and our lives. As he did in the Gospel, riding on a donkey, so too he comes to us in humility; he comes “in the name of the Lord”. Through the power of his divine love he forgives our sins and reconciles us to the Father and with ourselves.

Jesus is pleased with the crowd’s showing their affection for him. When the Pharisees ask him to silence the children and the others who are acclaiming him, he responds: “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out” (*Lk 19:40*). Nothing could dampen their enthusiasm for Jesus’ entry. May nothing prevent us from finding in him the source of our joy, true joy, which abides and brings peace; for it is Jesus alone who saves

us from the snares of sin, death, fear and sadness.

Today's liturgy teaches us that the Lord has not saved us by his triumphal entry or by means of powerful miracles. The Apostle Paul, in the second reading, epitomizes in two verbs the path of redemption: Jesus "emptied" and "humbled" himself (*Phil 2:7-8*). These two verbs show the boundlessness of God's love for us. Jesus *emptied himself*: he did not cling to the glory that was his as the Son of God, but became the Son of man in order to be in solidarity with us sinners in all things; yet he was without sin. Even more, he lived among us in "the condition of a servant" (v. 7); not of a king or a prince, but of a servant. Therefore he humbled himself, and the abyss of his humiliation, as Holy Week shows us, seems to be bottomless.

The first sign of this love “without end” (*Jn 13:1*) is the washing of the feet. “The Lord and Master” (*Jn 13:14*) stoops to his disciples’ feet, as only servants would have done. He shows us by example that we need to allow his love to reach us, a love which bends down to us; we cannot do any less, we cannot love without letting ourselves be loved by him first, without experiencing his surprising tenderness and without accepting that true love consists in concrete service.

But this is only the beginning. The humiliation of Jesus reaches its utmost in the Passion: he is sold for thirty pieces of silver and betrayed by the kiss of a disciple whom he had chosen and called his friend. Nearly all the others flee and abandon him; Peter denies him three times in the courtyard of the temple. Humiliated in his spirit by mockery, insults and spitting, he suffers in his body

terrible brutality: the blows, the scourging and the crown of thorns make his face unrecognizable. He also experiences shame and disgraceful condemnation by religious and political authorities: he is *made into sin* and *considered to be unjust*. Pilate then sends him to Herod, who in turn sends him to the Roman governor. Even as every form of justice is denied to him, Jesus also experiences in his own flesh indifference, since no one wishes to take responsibility for his fate. And I think of the many people, so many outcasts, so many asylum seekers, so many refugees, all of those for whose fate no one wishes to take responsibility. The crowd, who just a little earlier had acclaimed him, now changes their praise into a cry of accusation, even to the point of preferring that a murderer be released in his place. And so the hour of death on the cross arrives, that most painful form of shame reserved

for traitors, slaves and the worst kind of criminals. But isolation, defamation and pain are not yet the full extent of his deprivation. To be totally in solidarity with us, he also experiences on the Cross the mysterious abandonment of the Father. In his abandonment, however, he prays and entrusts himself: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (*Lk 23:46*).

Hanging from the wood of the cross, beside derision he now confronts the last temptation: to come down from the Cross, to conquer evil by might and to show the face of a powerful and invincible God. Jesus, however, even here at the height of his annihilation, reveals the true face of God, which is mercy. He forgives those who are crucifying him, he opens the gates of paradise to the repentant thief and he touches the heart of the centurion. If the mystery of evil is unfathomable, then the reality of Love poured out through

him is infinite, reaching even to the tomb and to hell. He takes upon himself all our pain that he may redeem it, bringing light to darkness, life to death, love to hatred.

God's way of acting may seem so far removed from our own, that he was annihilated for our sake, while it seems difficult for us to even forget ourselves a little. He comes to save us; we are called to choose his way: the way of service, of giving, of forgetfulness of ourselves. Let us walk this path, pausing in these days to gaze upon the Crucifix; it is the "royal seat of God". I invite you during this week to gaze often upon this "royal seat of God", to learn about the humble love which saves and gives life, so that we may give up all selfishness, and the seeking of power and fame. By humbling himself, Jesus invites us to walk on his path. Let us turn our faces to him, let us ask for the grace to understand

at least something of the mystery of his obliteration for our sake; and then, in silence, let us contemplate the mystery of this Week.

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