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Behold the King, hosanna in the highest heaven

How great is Jesus Christ? St Matthew records the words Christ once told the crowds of people who came to see him (12:41): “On Judgement Day the men of Nineveh will appear against this generation and they will be its condemnation, because when Jonah preached they repented; and look, there is something greater than Jonah here.

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Jesus is greater than Abraham, greater than Moses, greater than David. He is greater than all the prophets, priests and kings of all times. He is greater than any man or woman who has ever lived. And yet, he insisted on shunning all human glory. Except for one brief moment. That moment is the one we remember today on Palm Sunday.

St Matthew described what he saw with his own eyes (21:9): “The crowds who went in front of him and those who followed were all shouting: ‘Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heavens!’ And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil as people asked, ‘Who is this?’ and the crowds answered,

‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.’”

Imagine standing in the crowd. It would feel like a political rally. You would be shouting: “Hosanna to the son of David!” To every Jew that ever lived in Israel, the phrase meant one and only one thing. This is our king. Not just one more king to be succeeded by another king. This is the king who will sit on the throne of David and rule over the whole world forever!

Why did Jesus shun political power for many years and suddenly appear to welcome it? He welcomed it because “his hour had come”—the day when he would offer sacrifice to save us from the power of Satan. He shunned it for the same reason. Before all else, he was the Eternal High Priest. If you doubt this, read the Letter to the Hebrews, especially chapter 9, especially the last verse.

Was Jesus a political leader? He was, he is, much more. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. His kingdom will fulfil Isaiah's prophecy (2:2): "All the nations will stream to Jerusalem. Then he will judge between the nations. They will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles. Nation will not lift sword against nation, no longer will they learn how to make war."

This article by Fr. Joe Babendreier first appeared in the Sunday Nation in April 2020.

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