

PALM SUNDAY 2021

Today we begin Holy week. The Church celebrates today as both Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday which is also the beginning of Holy Week. Today's liturgy combines contrasting moments of glory and suffering – the royal welcome given to Jesus by his followers and the unjust drama of his trial culminating in His crucifixion.

In those days, when a king or general rode in on a horse, he was coming to rule often with an iron fist. But if he rode in on a donkey, he was coming in peace like Jesus. The people waving palm branches welcomed and acknowledged Jesus as their king and promoter of peace.

Do I welcome Jesus into my heart? Am I ready to surrender my life to him during this Holy Week and welcome him into all areas of my life as my Lord and Savior? The palms should remind us that Christ is our King and the true answer to our quest for peace, happiness and meaning in life.

Are we like the humble donkey that carried Jesus? Let us carry and radiate Jesus' universal love, unconditional forgiveness and sacrificial service to our families, schools, work places and communities.

Jesus saw aspects of his own life and mission foreshadowed in the Servant Songs of Isaiah and the Church refers to them in this time of solemn meditation on the climax of Jesus' earthly life. Today's first reading is called the third Servant Song of Isaiah. These songs are about a mysterious figure whose suffering brings about a benefit for the people.

The second reading, from Paul's letter to the Philippians, is an ancient Christian hymn representing a very early Christian understanding of who Jesus is, and of how his mission saves us from sin and death. In it we remember the most important things Our Lord did.

In the Passion of Christ according to Mark, we are challenged to examine our own lives in the light of some of the characters in the story like Peter who denied Jesus, Judas who betrayed Jesus, Pilate who acted against his conscience and condemned Jesus to death on the cross, Herod who ridiculed Jesus and the leaders of the people who preserved their positions by getting rid of Jesus.

Let us not overlook those who were kind to Jesus. We have Simon the leper, who hosted Jesus before the Passover, the woman who anointed Jesus given the fact that when He would be executed there would be no possibility of a Jewish funeral rite. Simon of Cyrene who helped Jesus carry His cross and Joseph of Arimathea who courageously asked Pilate for the body of Jesus and laid it in his new tomb hewn out of rock. All these people were a light amidst all the darkness around Jesus during His tough moments. May we learn from them so that we too can be signs of hope in a world that really, really cries for it.

Holy Week challenges us to remember the events which brought about our redemption and salvation, to appreciate gratefully the price Jesus paid for our salvation, and to return God's love for us, expressed through the suffering and death of Jesus, by loving others as He loved us.

The meditation on these Paschal mysteries should enable us to do our own dying to sin and rising with Jesus, which will result in our healing, reconciliation, and redemption. Proper participation in the Holy Week liturgy will also deepen our relationship with God as we do His will like Jesus. It will also increase our faith and strengthen our lives as true disciples of Jesus.

May we pray for the courage to follow Jesus into Jerusalem this week, suffer with Him, die to our sins with Him and finally rise with Him to a new life on Easter. May the anticipation of His resurrection give us hope to endure our current suffering and pain knowing that the glory of the resurrection awaits us. Amen.