

## Palm Sunday 2015

Reflection after Mark 11:1-10 [the Gospel read when the palms are blessed]

In the reading we just heard, Jesus is called "Master" In the Passion of Mark that we will hear, he refers to himself as "Teacher" & Shepherd." Pilate & the soldiers will call him "King of the Jews". The crowds who spread palms in his path quote Psalm 118 and call him "he who comes in the name of the Lord." They were cheering for the one they thought would be their Messiah. They were looking for a triumphant king. But Jesus calls himself the **Son of Man** 4 times in the Passion reading, and many more times in the Gospel of Mark. The meaning of that title is simply, "The human one," and it describes the Christ we believe in.

But he is not only human. The last name he is given in the passion reading is the one the centurion says: "Truly this man was the Son of God."

### Homily in preparation for reading the Passion

Isaiah 50:4-7 *God opens my ear that I may hear I gave my cheeks to those who plucked my beard.*  
Psalm 22 "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"  
Philippians 2:6-11 *Christ Jesus emptied himself, becoming obedient even to death, death on a cross.*

♪ *Only this I want: but to know the Lord*  
*and to bear his cross, so to wear the crown he wore.* ♪

That song is a summary of how we are called to enter into Holy Week. The reading from Philippians we just heard is the pattern of the Passion we are about to hear, and a lens, a kind of window to look through, so we can connect it to our lives." The words that come before that reading "*Your attitude must be that of Christ.*"

The passion of Christ reveals that applause and acclamation pass quickly, and life is fragile. Jesus was a rock star on Palm Sunday! We heard about that in the Gospel I read before the palms were blessed. Even the owners of the colt, the young donkey, did what Jesus wanted as soon as they knew he was the one who wanted it. The same thing happens when Jesus sends his disciples to find a place for them to celebrate the Passover.

The crowds that spread palm branches sang hosannas! Hosanna means, literally, "*save now.*" Today it would be like applause, or "Hooray! We are saved!" They were applauding Jesus because they thought he was going to save them from their oppression and domination by the Romans.

They thought he was the Christ, which is Greek for Messiah, and they were right. But "Christ" is not his last name, it is his mission. And most of the people of his time, and even our own, did not know what kind of messiah Jesus was. Notice that it is Pilate and the soldiers who call him the king of the Jews, but Jesus calls himself the Son of Man, which means the human one. He is the one who reveals what it means to be fully human - both in the pain of his passion and the glory of his resurrection.

Jesus was certainly about to save those who follow him, then and now, but not the way the people who sang hosanna expected him to do it. He would save us from our sins and from the fear that keeps us in bondage within ourselves. The way he did it is described in the reading of the passion. He embraced the fragility of human life, with all its fear and insecurity, and put all his trust in God. He identified with the suffering servant in the reading from Isaiah, and chose to empty himself, becoming obedient to his father even to the point of death, so that he could receive life as a gift.

Perhaps we are *better* able to hear the meaning of the Passion and of the events of this Holy Week *because* we live in a time of economic insecurity in the world and profound change in the Church. Acclamation and approval are never permanent, and life is always fragile, it is always a free gift. We may not pay attention to that in times of prosperity and stability.

The woman who anointed Jesus felt that fragility - she knew he was going to die. The others who got angry were denying their grief that Jesus was about to be tried and condemned. When Jesus said, "*The poor you will always have with you,*" he was saying, in a way, that **he** would always be with us in the least of our brothers and sisters.

Peter let fear control him, the fear that his life was as threatened as his master's, and so he denied Jesus. He opened himself to grace and new life when he wept as the rooster crowed.

As we listen to the passion according to Mark today, I invite you to bring all your feelings to the cross and commend them into God's hands, the way Jesus did. May we listen today aware of our need to be set free, and full of the hope that this acclamation expresses:

♪ Save us savior, save us, savior, save us savior of the world.

For by your cross and resurrection, you have set, have set us, set us free. ♪

**The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark** [Mark 14:1-15:47]