



CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

March 29, 2015

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Gospel reading Mark 11:1-10 *[To be read aloud]*

When Jesus and his disciples drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethpage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately on entering it, you will find a colt tethered on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone should say to you, 'Why are you doing this?' reply, 'The Master has need of it and will send it back here at once.'" So they went off and found a colt tethered at a gate outside on the street, and they untied it. Some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They answered them just as Jesus had told them to, and they permitted them to do it. So they brought the colt to Jesus and put their cloaks over it. And he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. Those preceding him as well as those following kept crying out: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is to come! Hosanna in the highest!"

Brief commentary:

Today we begin the Christian Great Week: although all "times and all seasons belong to Him," Christians nonetheless honor this week as different, as 'Holy'. Holy Week stands at the foundation and core of the Christian experience of salvation, but also at the foundation and core of all history, for this is the Passover of Christ's suffering, death, burial and glorious resurrection. The celebration of Palm Sunday ('Hosanna Sunday' in the churches of the East) commemorates the triumphant entrance of Jesus of Nazareth through the gates of Jerusalem on the threshold of his suffering. Similarly, we welcome Christ anew through the door of our hearts, our homes, our parishes and communities. With palms (ancient symbols of victory) we hold them high joining the choir of 'hosannas' ("save us" in Hebrew), and bring these blessed palms into our homes to mark them as homes of believers. This Sunday too is called Passion Sunday, because as a Church we join the recital of the entire Passion narrative of a gospel. Indeed, we are included as participants in the reading, with the awareness that somehow we are all participants in the suffering of the Lord. And joining him in his Passion, we hope in his mercy to have a share in his glorious resurrection. Both the reading from Isaiah and the traditional praying of the twenty-second psalm about a righteous sufferer, applied to Jesus by the earliest Christians, allow us to understand the suffering of Jesus – as an act of total loving and redemptive self-donation – as the fulfillment of God's saving plan for the world. The Christological hymn found in Paul's letter to the Philippians expresses in a few words the core narrative of Jesus' incarnation, solidarity with the human race, humility, obedient suffering and ignominious death on the cross, his resurrection and supreme exaltation as Lord "to the glory of God the Father." It is the story of how God "who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..." It is the proclamation of the Christian gospel of the redemptive and victorious love of Jesus Christ. By his entrance on a donkey through Jerusalem's eastern gate, Jesus was associating himself with the prophetic description of the Messiah's humble coming found in the book of the prophet Zechariah. When Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, surrounded by the crowds including the poor, outcasts, sinners, and infirmed, he reminds the rulers of what they should be doing in service to the people.

By so doing, Jesus was also showing that his version of 'messiah' was not as a politico-military ruler, but as the humble servant of the Lord and compassionate savior of the people. Such an entrance was therefore both inspiring and highly provocative, and thus set into motion the process of those opposed to him which would lead to his death.

Today's reading offers significant messages:

- Holy Week is the heart of the Christian calendar, because the Passover of the Lord Jesus is the hallmark of the mission and the heart of the Christian experience of salvation.
- Holy Week is also our Passover when Christians, joined to Jesus' death and resurrection, recall our own passage from death to life and new birth as God's people.
- Palm Sunday calls us to "open wide the doors of our hearts, and homes, and lives, to Jesus Christ." It reminds the Church to extend Jesus' mission to the poor, the outcast, and the sinner, the suffering; for Jesus Christ is the servant of the God and savior of the people.

For our shared or personal reflection:

After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.

- What does Holy Week represent to me? What does it call me to?
- How have I experienced the saving grace of death to sin and new life in Jesus Christ?
 - How am I involved in the Church's mission to the poor, the outcast, the sinner, the suffering in my local community and in the world?

Suggested readings: Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 595-630