

REFLECTION ON PALM SUNDAY

By Fr. Tom Brenberger

In his gospel, St. Luke often presents Jesus as being on a journey to Jerusalem. Luke is not speaking of a geographical trip from one place to another (like a trip from Maria Stein to Dayton); rather, He is speaking about Jesus marching toward His destiny, purpose, and "*His Hour*", which will be completed there.

I have always thought about PALM SUNDAY as being the "kick-off" of the greatest week of events in the history of our salvation. It inaugurates us into the solemn celebration of Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection. Although these events are celebrated over a period of several days, they really form one overall celebration--each one being an essential piece of the overall mosaic of our salvation..

The Palm Sunday liturgy commemorates Christ's solemn and definitive entry into Jerusalem to accomplish what the Father sent Him to do. The celebration usually begins outside the sanctuary with an introduction to the blessing of palms: The celebrant says:

"Since the beginning of Lent we have prepared our hearts by penance and charitable works. Today we gather together to herald with the whole Church the beginning of the celebration of our Lord's Paschal Mystery (the Passion and the Resurrection). For it was to accomplish this mystery that He entered his own city of Jerusalem. Therefore, with all faith and devotion, let us commemorate the Lord's entry into the city for our salvation, following in his footsteps, so that, being made by his grace partakers of the Cross, we may have a share in his Resurrection and in his life."

At that point the palms are blessed and a gospel reading recounting Christ's entry into the city of Jerusalem is read. The procession to the sanctuary then takes place. During the actual mass, a "Passion Account" from Matthew, Mark, or Luke is read. (The Passion according to John is always read on Good Friday itself). The New Testament reading for the Mass is very significant. It is from Paul's Letter to the Philippians, ch. 2,vs.6-11. This is one of my favorite

biblical texts. It presents to us a capsule view of our salvation through the incarnation of Christ:

"Your attitude must be Christ's: though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and took on the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross! Because of this, God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every other name. So that at Jesus' name every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God the Father: JESUS CHRIST IS LORD!"

This year is certainly unique, with the appearance of COVID-19 and the essential need for "social distancing" to safeguard, not only our own personal health, but also that of all our brothers and sisters. It is truly a time for CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY and reaching out to others in many different ways. This means that we will have to forgo our traditional way of celebrating Holy Week, finding a new way adapted to each one's particular circumstances. I would encourage each of you to make use of the resources that are available to you to do so. Some will have the opportunity to watch (and participate in) televised, as well as on-line presentations, of Holy Week Services. I would encourage families to pick up their bibles and read together gospel accounts of the Last Supper, the Passion, Death, and Resurrection narratives. Of particular note is the "High Priestly Prayer" of Jesus during the Last Supper (John 17:1-26).

Through His Death on Good Friday, Christ saved us from our sins; but through His Ressurrection, on Easter, He gave us eternal life. The Easter Masses are special because they bring both of these elements together and connect them in a personal way to our baptism. These saving mysteries all begin with our Palm Sunday celebration of the Greatest Week ever.