

## Palm Sunday C

The Bishop of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris during the early part of the last century was a great evangelizer who tried to reach out to unbelievers, scoffers, and cynics. He liked to tell the story of a young man who would stand outside the cathedral and shout derogatory slogans at the people entering to worship. He would call them fools and other insulting names. The people tried to ignore him, but it was difficult. One day the parish priest went outside to confront the young man, much to the distress of the parishioners. The young man ranted and raved against everything the priest told him. Finally, the priest told the young man, “I’m going to dare you to do something, and I bet you can’t do it.” And of course the young man shot back, “I can do anything you propose, you wimp!” “Fine,” said the priest. “All I ask you to do is to come into the sanctuary with me. I want you to stare at the figure of Christ on His cross, and I want you to scream at the very top of your lungs, as loudly as you can. ‘Christ died on the cross for me, and I don’t care one bit.’” So the young man went into the sanctuary, and looking at the figure, screamed as loudly as he could, “Christ died on the cross for me, and I don’t care one bit.” The priest asked him to keep repeating. The young man repeated it a few times and then he could not. No voice came out of his mouth. He kept looking at the crucifix, but the words wouldn’t come. He fell on his knees and asked pardon from the people. Then the Bishop said, “I was that young man. I thought I didn’t need God but found out that I did.”

The Church celebrates today as both Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. It is on Palm Sunday that we enter the Holy Week, the most sacred week of the year for us Christians. This is the week when we celebrate the Lord’s last supper, passion, death, and resurrection—the events that brought about our redemption and salvation. The Holy Week liturgy makes present for us the actual events of the dying and rising of Jesus. Further, the liturgy enables us to experience in our lives here and now what Jesus went through then. Let us actively participate in the Holy Week liturgy. Proper participation in the Holy Week liturgy will deepen our relationship with God, increase our faith, and strengthen our lives as disciples of Jesus.

But let us remember that Holy Week can become “holy” for us only if we actively and consciously take part in the liturgy of this week. Today’s liturgy combines two contrasting moments of glory and suffering—the welcome of Jesus in Jerusalem and the drama of his trial, culminating in his crucifixion.

There are four Suffering Servant Songs in the Book of Prophet Isaiah. Today’s first reading is one of them. Jesus is the one who is referred to as the suffering servant, whose praises Isaiah sang almost 700 years before the coming of Jesus. The second reading is one of the earliest Christian hymns showing their understanding of Christ. In the gospel, we heard about the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Most people knew some of the psalms by heart those days. So they welcomed Jesus singing, “Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest of heavens,” which is psalm #118. Before the beginning of the procession, Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Lk.19: 41-42) and, when the procession was over, he cleansed the Temple (Lk 19:45-46). On the following day he cursed a barren fig tree.

Today, we receive palm branches at the Divine Liturgy. Let us take them to our homes and place them somewhere where we can always see them. Let the palms remind us that Christ is the king of our families, that Christ is the king of our hearts, that Christ is the only true answer to our quest for happiness and meaning in our lives. And if we do proclaim Christ as our king, let us try to make time for Him in our daily life; let us be reminded that He is the one with whom we will be spending eternity. Let us be reminded further that our careers, our education, our finances, our homes—all of the basic material needs in our lives are only temporary. Let us prioritize and place Christ the King as the primary concern in our lives. It is only when we have done this that we will find true peace and happiness in our confused and complex world.