

A Reflection for Palm Sunday

Holy Week allows us to enter into the mystery of our salvation, it is an intense week of prayer, contemplation and worship, and whilst this year our celebration of these mysteries will be very different we will no less enter into them as fully as we are able. Today we enter with Jesus into Jerusalem in triumph. The crowds sing their hosannas and wave their palm branches at the one who they called their king, a few days later they would cry 'crucify'. The account of the Passion in St Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 26:14-27, 66) allows us to enter deeply into the drama of Holy Week. I encourage you to take some time in the coming days to read the account and hear your own voice speaking in the crowd, and to hear the Lord's words of forgiveness and care. One of the most moving, and indeed difficult, things for us to do where we together would be for us to cry as the crowd 'Crucify Him!' and yet it is important for us to do this. It helps us to remember that even those who cry crucify and who enact the act of crucifixion are forgiven by the Lord who prays 'Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing'. It reminds us that 'while we were still sinners Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8). We must in these days hold onto this trust and hope that we are forgiven and redeemed by our Saviour, and that nothing can change this. The changes and difficulties we are currently experiencing will not and cannot change that fact that Jesus died to redeem us from our sins. This is a fact and it is something we should cling to in these days. And we can offer these days in unity with the suffering of Christ on the Cross. We can try to use them to draw close to Him who walks with us in our time of struggle. The theologian St Gregory of Nazianzen encourages each Christian to enter deeply into the mystery of the Passion of Christ in this way:

'If you are Simon of Cyrene, take up your cross and follow Christ. If you are crucified beside him like one of the thieves, now, like the good thief, acknowledge you God. For your sake, and because of your sin, Christ himself was regarded as a sinner, for his sake, therefore, you must cease to sin. Worship him who was hung on the cross because of you, even if you are hanging there yourself. If you are Joseph of Arimathea, go to the one who ordered his crucifixion, and ask for Christ's body. Make you own the expiation for the sins of the whole world. If you are Nicodemus, the man who worshipped God by night, bring spices and prepare Christ's body for burial. If you are one of the Marys, or Salome, or Joanna, weep in the early morning. Be the first to see the stone rolled back, and even the angels perhaps, and Jesus himself.'

This week who will you be as you walk with Jesus on the way to the Cross. How will you seek to serve him? How will you draw closer to him? Jesus invites you to walk this way with Him and he will support you on the journey just as he bore the whole world on his shoulders on the Cross. Although we are scattered this Holy Week we are still the Body of Christ and we enter into this week of the Passion together to go with Jesus, one man, who will die for us all.

May God bless you until we meet again.