

Lent 6 - Palm Sunday

Morning Prayer A

First Lesson: Zech 9:9-12

Second Lesson: Mark 11:1-11

Homily

The land of promise was under oppression,
under the rule of foreigners,
dominated by a faraway power
that had no interest in the ancient ways
of an ancient land,
and no interest in the God of their fathers,
but served alien gods,
and spread an alien culture and alien laws
that seized their property,
squeezed ever higher taxes from them,
and enforced their laws with brutal force.

Ordinary Jewish people hurt deeply
under this oppression.
They valued their God,
the worship in the Temple and in the synagogues,
and the customs and traditions
of their ancient way of life.
All this was threatened,
and their material well-being also.

They were poor, poorer than they had been,
their substance was being seized by foreigners,
and sent away to far places.

There was an ancient tradition,
a little vague and poorly understood,
veiled in the words of the prophets,
but central to their message,
and remembered in the countless folktales
of a captive nation.

The air was full of this expectation,
of a Messiah, an anointed one, a King,
an heir of the House of David,
who would deliver His people.

More and more they rested their hopes on this
promise.

More and more they pined for His coming.

There was a man, a desert preacher, named John,
whose charismatic ministry had led many to wonder
if this was the promised Messiah;

but he was now dead,
his head chopped off by the despised King Herod.

Hopes were dashed once more, but ...

there was another preacher, a man from Nazareth,
a certain Joshua ben Joseph

(we know him by the Greek form, Jesus),

who had been preaching and working miracles

all through Judea and Galilee,
even in Samaria and in the Gentile North.
Maybe this was the Messiah at last.

It was almost Passover.
People were coming to Jerusalem
from every direction.
Many of them had stories about this Jesus,
and there was a lot of talk about his preaching,
his message, and his miracles.

And then, in the crowded streets, they saw,
just as it was predicted so long ago, --
riding on a donkey,
with his followers alongside --
the very one of whom they were talking.
They threw branches in the road before him,
and even their own cloaks,
for him to ride over, as Malachi had written,
and as that John had quoted,
to prepare a way for the Lord.

"Hosanna!"
"It is the King!"
"Hail the Son of David!"
They shouted in the streets,
and made way for him as they would for a king.

But the excitement of His entrance
isn't the message of this day.
Though He deserves every bit of the praise,
though rejoicing in his presence is always right,
this is not a day of rejoicing.
This is the beginning of the solemn remembrance
of His passion and death,
of the Cross and the Sacrifice there offered.

The jubilant shouts of his entrance
are strangely, ironically, echoed mere days later,
as the crowds shout once again,
"Crucify him! Crucify him!"
The Gospel of today's Mass is not
the one we just heard,
but the solemn reading of
the Passion according to St Matthew,
the account of His condemnation,
suffering, and death.

Yes, we remember an entrance,
yes, it is the entrance of the King of kings,
and, yes,
it is an entrance into new and everlasting life.
Next week we remember
His triumphant resurrection from the grave,
but this life is entered only through the grave.

Today's entrance is to a dire and dark walk.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death..."

says the Psalm, and through that valley He walked,
and, with Him, it is through that valley we walk,
and it is dark before the dawn.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, as we, with those children of old,
rejoice in thy presence among us,
may we be faithful to thee in the valleys of life,
and, in solemn remembrance of thy Cross and
passion,
may we come with thee to life everlasting.
Amen.

Lent 6 - Palm Sunday

Morning Prayer B

First Lesson: Isa 52:13-53:12

Second Lesson: Matt 26

Homily

Where does one begin in preaching these lessons?
There is enough content in these two passages
to fill out a year's worth of sermons.
All one can do is try.

This is Palm Sunday.
The name stresses the triumphant entrance
of Jesus into Jerusalem,
but these lessons don't even reference that.
You see, the cheering crowds
were looking for a conquering king.
They hoped that this man had come
to take arms and drive the Romans out.
Yes, it was the entrance of a King,
but what kind of King?
An entrance into what?
and for what purpose?

We heard that bone-chilling passage from Isaiah,
the one where he asks

"Who hath believed our report?"

Who indeed? Surely not the cheering crowds.
They certainly did not have in mind
a man of sorrows and grief,
one who bore their griefs, sorrows, and sins,
one who was stricken, smitten of God,
and afflicted --- for them.
It was a hoped-for conqueror they cheered,
and the prophets words were strange to them,
strange and ignored.

"Who hath believed our report?"

Not the apostles.
Right up until the very moment
the refused to believe what Christ Himself
said about his impending death.

"Who hath believed our report?"

One woman did,
probably not the most reputable of women.
She knew who He was,
and brought precious oils to anoint Him,
as He said,
*"in that she hath poured this ointment on my body,
she did it for my burial. "*

The entrance of Palm Sunday
 looked like a triumphant entrance,
 the coming of a conquering King,
 and so it ultimately was,
 but it was an entrance into fearful suffering,
 painful betrayal, an unjust trial,
 the heaping of shame upon the Innocent One,
 and a horrible death.

The time was drawing near.
 He celebrated Passover with His friends.
 He gave them His own Body and Blood,
 the seal of that soon-to-be-offered Sacrifice.
 He went to the garden to pray with them,
 and they failed him there.
 He was arrested, and they ran and hid.
 The boldest of His disciples quaked in fear,
 and denied knowing Him.

"Who hath believed our report?"
 asked Isaiah.

Have we? Have we really?
 Do we know the consequences of our own sin?
 Do we look at the crucifix and remember why?
 Are we prepared to follow Him
 as though we know the cost?
 Or do we expect that things will be easy?

Do we want a faith that does everything for us,
 and doesn't cost?

Let us pray

Ah, Holy Jesus, how hast thou offended,
 that man to judge thee hath in hate pretended?
 By foes derided, by thine own rejected,
 O most afflicted.

Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee?
 Alas, my treason, Jesus hath undone thee.
 "Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee"
 I crucified thee. Amen.

Lent 6 - Palm Sunday

Evening Prayer A

First Lesson: Jer 8:9-15, 18-9:1

Second Lesson: 1 Cor 1:17-31

Homily

*"...every one dealeth falsely.
For they have
healed the hurt of the daughter of my people
slightly,
saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace."*

Striking words from today's reading from Jeremiah.
They come as part of a strong indictment
of the serious sins of the wise men.
the prophets, and the priests of God's people.
The rest of them are obvious evils, but healing?
We tend to think of that as always a good thing,
but, in this list, it is perhaps the worst of all.
To heal -- slightly.
Another translation
speaks of healing wounds superficially.
Do you know what happens
if you stitch up a wound without disinfecting it?
Infection. Hidden rot. Perhaps gangrene.
And after gangrene, death.

Healing slightly may be worse
than not healing at all.

Palm Sunday.

A grand and exciting parade.

A celebration for the King, the Messiah,
who has come to drive those awful Romans out.
Hosanna!

If He had been what they thought He was,
he certainly would have been able to do that,
to drive the Romans out,
to set the nation free,
and let the priests restore every appearance
of a God-fearing chosen nation.

But would that have healed their sickness?
Would it have got rid of the underlying rot?
Or would it have closed up the wound,
and left the sins to fester within,
and destroy them?

*"...they have
healed the hurt of the daughter of my people
slightly,
saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace."*

None of the peace
that passes all human understanding.

*"Is there no balm in Gilead;
is there no physician there?
why then is not the health
of the daughter of my people recovered? ...
Oh that my head were waters,
and mine eyes a fountain of tears,
that I might weep day and night
for the slain of the daughter of my people!"*

He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
He came to do
what we didn't even know needed doing.

Listen to St. Paul:

*"...the Jews require a sign,
and the Greeks seek after wisdom:
But we preach Christ crucified,
unto the Jews a stumblingblock,
and unto the Greeks foolishness;"*

To those looking for concrete evidence,
a king with an army would have been proof
that God was setting things right.
Visible evidence is what the Jews wanted.
It's pretty much what we want, isn't it?
There are still those who won't believe

without watertight logical proof.
Several of them have best-selling books.
But we preach Christ crucified.
To the positive thinkers,
to those who need visible proof,
to those who require that things come out UK,
by their definition, in the here and now,
the sight of a leader being executed,
especially in such a messy and horrible way,
seems to define his cause as all in vain,
worthless, meaningless.
To those looking for logical proof,
well, the crucifix just doesn't make sense.
It won't fit into any of their categories of reason.
It's all foolishness.

*"But unto them which are called,
both Jews and Greeks,
Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.
Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men;
and the weakness of God is stronger than men. "*

Superficial healing is worse than none at all.
The weak and self-serving message
heard from most pulpits today
is quite able
to make people feel better about themselves,
but is that what we need?

We don't need deliverance from the pain of life.
That pain
is often a symptom of what really needs healing,
of our deep seated sin.
Only in the sacrifice of the Cross is sin healed,
only in knowing that we deserved what we see,
and, aside from His free acceptance of our evil,
we still do.

It's not a visible conquering king that we preach.
It's not all kinds of psychological healing,
"But we preach Christ crucified."

Let us pray.

O eternal Word, Son of God, Lord everlasting, King
of kings, Lord of our souls, thou rulest from thy
painful throne, from that tree whereon thou didst
hang for our salvation, and thereupon thou lookest
upon us with love. Heal the depths of our hearts by
thy precious Blood. Burn away our sins with thy
piercing gaze. Make us clean and well within, and,
at the last, bring us to everlasting life with thee as
though reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost,
now and unto all ages. Amen.

Lent 6 - Palm Sunday

Evening Prayer B

First Lesson: Isa 59:1-3, 9-21

Second Lesson: John 12:20-36

Homily

*"And the Redeemer shall come to Zion,
and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob,
saith the LORD. "*

We call this Palm Sunday,
as if the little parade
with the donkey and the palm branches,
and the cheering people
was what it is all about.

That is a start.

We can read the lesson from Isaiah
as pointing to that.

The Redeemer did come to Zion Hill,
to the city of Jerusalem where the Temple stood.
He did enter in with a triumphant greeting,
but He did not come, as many of them thought,
to validate the high opinion this nation had of itself.
He came to those who would turn from transgression.

It was not a message of sweet comfort He brought.

He did not come to make things easier

*"...your iniquities have separated
between you and your God,"
wrote the prophet,
"and your sins have hid his face from you,
that he will not hear."*

This passage describes a people
who are so deep in sin
that they are not better than their enemies,
and a Lord that will help them,
but only when they have turned from their sins,
and knows full well that they will not,
not on their own.

*"Yea, truth faileth;
and he that departeth from evil
maketh himself a prey:
and the LORD saw it,
and it displeased him that there was no judgment.
And he saw that there was no man,*

*"There is none righteous, no not one,"
it says elsewhere, and
"All have sinned
and come short of the glory of God."*

We are so unclean as to be incapable of coming to please God.

*"and wondered that there was no intercessor:
therefore his arm brought salvation unto him;
and his righteousness, it sustained him."*

Over and over, this phrase, "the arm of the Lord"
in the Old Testament,
finds fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Himself.
There was no intercessor,
therefore God the Son took flesh and became man
that He might be that Intercessor,
that though Him there might be hope,
that through Him we might be saved.

A bit earlier in Jesus' ministry,
St. John recorded this:

*"And there were certain Greeks among them
that came up to worship at the feast:
The same came therefore to Philip,
which was of Bethsaida of Galilee,
and desired him, saying,
Sir, we would see Jesus."*

They were wise to seek Him,
but did they know what they sought?

The people of Jerusalem did not
on the day the Lord rode in.
When they were disappointed they turned on Him.

When Philip brought Christ the message,
He confused everyone
by beginning to talk about His death,
and in such strange terms:

*The hour is come,
that the Son of man should be glorified.*

Glorified?
Well, that sounds like a victory parade, doesn't it?
Or does it?

That glorification began on a cross,
passed through a grave,
and only then led to resurrection.
He said this:

*"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth,
will draw all men unto me."*

He was lifted up on a cruel cross,
died in agony in the sight of everyone,
died among the criminals,
naked and bloody,

a scandal to the world.

And from that Cross He draws all men,
all who will accept Him and follow Him,
through death and into resurrection.

Holy Week has begun.

Let us in our hearts and our minds,
in the liturgy of the Church,
in the holy Sacraments,
follow Him on that awful path,
the path that leads to eternal life.

Savior of the World, who by thy Cross and Passion
hast redeemed us, save us and help us, we humbly
beseech thee, O Lord.
Amen.