

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

The Sunday next before Easter,
commonly called Palm Sunday

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the ninth Verse of the ninth Chapter of Zechariah.ⁱⁱ

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth. As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto thee.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eleventh Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Mark.ⁱⁱⁱ

“And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage [**Beth-FAH-dgeh**] and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples, And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither. And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt? And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him. And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way. And they that went before, and they

that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest. And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson:

“And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him. And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.”^{iv}

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

With man, things can quickly change, but God never changes.

We have come today to Palm Sunday—the beginning of Holy Week in the Church calendar. During this week we remember our Lord Jesus Christ’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem to cries of adulation and praise, which would turn in only a few days to calls for His Crucifixion.

Sadly, it was many of the very same people who cried praises to Jesus who would turn around and call for his death only days later. Man’s affections can be fickle—and never more so than when they are disappointed. We can only be thankful that God is not so fickle with us when we disappoint Him—as we so regularly do.

While Jesus remained on Earth, none of His followers really understood what He was about. Not even the twelve Apostles truly understood who Jesus was, despite all He had done in their presence. All the miracles, all the teaching, even the examples of bring peace rather than a sword, had fallen on deaf ears and been seen by sightless eyes.

Even less than the Apostles did the general public understand who this man from Galilee was. The people wanted a leader, craved a champion who would bring the nation of Israel to worldly glory and power. What they failed to understand is that our Lord was not interested in worldly power. He instead focused—and tried to get them to focus—on far greater issues than the fate of this world.

His message was revolutionary and—from the point of view of the political and social leaders of the day—extremely dangerous. He was telling the people that real power did not exist in the hands of the political leaders. He said, in effect, that the Romans were irrelevant and that only God's authority mattered.

To governing ears, this was a direct challenge to the authority and rule of Rome. While the Romans did not seem to take Jesus Himself as a direct threat to them, they certainly were concerned about the influence He seemed to have with the public. His ability to lead by teaching, to inspire, to make people reconsider what they had been told by those in influential positions surely seemed ominous. Who knew how He might decide to use His ascendancy over the crowds; perhaps one day soon He would be moved to foment a new uprising like the recently-suppressed Zealot rebellion in Galilee.

Jesus told those people that the leaders of the Jewish faith were wrong in their pronouncements and regulations and were teaching things contrary to what God had stated. Every time they tried to confront Him on theological grounds, He made them look foolish. When they tried to entrap Him into positions that were untenable, He turned the tables on them. When they tried to physically entrap Him, Jesus seemed able to simply walk through crowds.

To the leaders of the Jewish faith—who held their unquestioned sway over Jewish life in Palestine simply by being beyond question—Jesus must have seemed a very dangerous man.

And what did the people think? This son of Joseph and Mary—a carpenter by trade—was a profoundly appealing leader. Instead of threatening, He gently explained His words in ways that even the simplest farmer, fisherman or servant could understand. To a people long accustomed to being told how worthless they were, how different were this Rabbi's words. He told them they were important to God, and that they, too, might get to heaven.

He performed incredible feats of healing, of feeding, of leadership. He must have seemed like a superhero. Remember that the people of Israel had been held under the dominance of the Romans for nearly a century. Their leaders were reduced to being sycophants to Rome. All real power and influence had been taken from them.

The people of Israel wanted their own leader. They wanted a military savior who would lead a revolt against the Romans and throw off the oppressive rule of the foreign rulers. But that was simply not what Jesus Christ was about. How puny the might of earthly rulers is in comparison to God.

As St. John would later report, when questioned by Pilate whether He was a king, Jesus answered, *“My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”*^v

Jesus is, of course, our King, but not an earthly king. He is our heavenly King—our eternal King. His fight was not with the powers of any earthly ruler, but rather with the ruler of the evil powers. The Jews did not, and perhaps could not, have possibly understood this. So they initially praised Jesus upon His entry to Jerusalem. They sat Him upon a colt, the Scriptures relate, and spread palm branches in the street before Him as he slowly entered the city.

The use of palm branches was an ancient Jewish tradition reflecting honor and royalty. In Leviticus, God commands Moses to

instruct the people of Israel, *“And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.”*^{vi}

So the people lined the streets and spread palms and waved them in honor of the man they presumed would lead them against Rome. They did not imagine that Jesus intended to save them not from Rome, but from their own sins. They shouted praises, *“Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.”*

They were convinced that their salvation from the rulers of Rome had arrived and that He was gathering His forces to defeat the overlords militarily. When, over the course of the next few days, they discovered that Jesus planned to save them instead from their sins by sacrifice, they were bitterly disappointed, and turned quickly on Him.

“Hosanna!” turned quickly to “Crucify him!” and the waving palm branches were replaced by the tearing pain of the scourge. Shouts of enthusiastic praise turned to bitter denunciation. Jesus, however, was not fazed. Determined, He stayed the course and achieved Salvation for us all.

With man, things quickly change. Let us be thankful that God does not change.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, we watch now with the crowd as You enter into Jerusalem for the final events of Your earthly life. We join with the crowd in delirious shouts of praise. Help us to remain faithful to You even as the crowd does not. Let us not be turned away by our fear, our worry, or disappointment. Let us stand with You when they yell, “Crucify Him!” Let us help you carry the weighty cross and stand by in wonder as You defeat all the forces of evil to open the doors of paradise for all believers. This we ask in Your Holy Name. Amen.

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ⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xx (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

ⁱⁱ *Zechariah 9:9-12 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *St. Mark 11:1-11 (KJV).*

^{iv} *St. Mark 11:7-10 (KJV).*

^v *St. John 18:36 (KJV).*

^{vi} *Leviticus 23:40 (KJV).*

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