

## March 24 Palm Sunday

The Church celebrates this sixth Sunday of Lent as both Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. This is the time of year we stop to remember and relive the events which brought about our redemption and salvation. What we commemorate and relive during this week is not just Jesus' dying and rising, but our own dying and rising in Jesus, which will result in our healing, reconciliation, and redemption. Attentive participation in the Holy Week liturgy will deepen our relationship with God, increase our Faith, and strengthen our lives as disciples of Jesus. Today's liturgy combines contrasting moments, one of glory, the other of suffering: the royal welcome of Jesus in Jerusalem, and the drama of the trial, culminating in crucifixion, death and burial for the Christ.

Today's first reading, the third of Isaiah's four Servant Songs, like the other three, foreshadows Jesus' own life and mission. The Refrain for today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 22), "My God, My God, why have You abandoned Me?" plunges us into the heart of Christ's Passion. The Second Reading, taken from Paul's letter to the Philippians, is an ancient Christian hymn representing a very early Christian understanding of who Jesus is, and of how his mission saves us from sin and death.

The first part of today's Gospel describes the royal reception Jesus received from his admirers, who paraded with him for a distance of two miles: from the Mount of Olives to the city of Jerusalem. In the second part of today's Gospel, we listen to/participate in a reading of the Passion of Christ according to Mark. We are challenged to examine our own lives in the light of some of the characters in the Passion story – like Peter who denied Jesus, Judas who betrayed Jesus, Herod who ridiculed Jesus, Pilate who acted against his conscience as he condemned Jesus to death on the cross, and the leaders of the people who preserved their position by getting rid of Jesus.

We need to answer 5 questions today:

- 1) Does Jesus weep over my sinful soul as he wept over Jerusalem at the beginning of his Palm Sunday procession?
- 2) Am I a barren fig tree? God expects me to produce fruits of holiness, purity, justice, humility, obedience, charity, and forgiveness. Do I? Or worse, do I

continue to produce bitter fruits of impurity, injustice, pride, hatred, jealousy and selfishness?

3) Will Jesus need to cleanse my heart with his whip? Jesus cannot tolerate the desecration of the temple of the Holy Spirit that I have become by my addiction to uncharitable, unjust and impure thoughts words and deeds; nor does Jesus praise my business mentality or calculation of loss and gain in my relationship with God, my Heavenly Father.

4) Do I welcome Jesus into my heart? Am I ready to surrender my life to him during this Holy Week and welcome him into all areas of my life as my Lord and Savior? Let us remember that we are all sinners who have crucified Jesus by our sins, but we are still able to turn to Jesus again to ask for pardon and mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is through the Passion of Jesus we receive forgiveness: "through his wounds we are healed." (Is 53:5).

5) Am I a donkey with a Christian name only, or one carrying Christ? An interesting as well as challenging old fable tells of the colt that carried Jesus on Palm Sunday. The colt thought that the reception was organized to honor him. "I am a unique donkey!" this excited animal might have thought. When he asked his mother if he could walk down the same street alone the next day and be honored again, his mother said, "No, you are nothing without Him who was riding you". Five days later, the colt saw a huge crowd of people in the street. It was Good Friday, and the soldiers were taking Jesus to Calvary. The colt could not resist the temptation of another royal reception. Ignoring the warning of his mother, he ran to the street, but he had to flee for his life as soldiers chased him and people stoned him. Thus, the colt finally learned the lesson that he was only a poor donkey without Jesus to ride on him. As we enter Holy Week, today's readings challenge us to examine our lives to see whether we carry Jesus within us and bear witness to Him through our living or are Christians in name only.