

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

This meditation for Palm Sunday, the beginning of our Holy Week Retreat, is in three parts. The first flows from the scripture of the day. The second invites you to remember celebrations of Holy Week in former years and the third asks you to bring your experiences of the present day to this time of prayer. Feel free to pray with these thoughts and questions throughout the day.

Mk: 11-1-10

When Jesus and his disciples drew near to Jerusalem,
to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives,
he sent two of his disciples and said to them,
“Go into the village opposite you,
and immediately on entering it,
you will find a colt tethered on which no one has ever sat.
Untie it and bring it here.
If anyone should say to you,
‘Why are you doing this?’ reply,
‘The Master has need of it
and will send it back here at once.’”
So they went off
and found a colt tethered at a gate outside on the street,
and they untied it.
Some of the bystanders said to them,
“What are you doing, untying the colt?”
They answered them just as Jesus had told them to,
and they permitted them to do it.

So they brought the colt to Jesus
and put their cloaks over it.

And he sat on it.

Many people spread their cloaks on the road,
and others spread leafy branches
that they had cut from the fields.

Those preceding him as well as those following kept crying out:

“Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is to come!

Hosanna in the highest!”

Praying with Scripture

As you read through the passage above, are you able to imagine the crowds lining the streets? Can you sense their excitement and expectation as they see the prophet, Jesus, fulfilling the prophecy of Zephaniah? Whose faces do you see in the crowd? Think of the people whom Jesus healed, fed and forgave. Were they there in this sea of people, cheering on Jesus who had touched their lives so powerfully? Can you hear the voices of the crowd acclaiming him?

And what of his disciples? What are they thinking and feeling? Can you imagine the conversation between the disciples who have been waiting for this moment since they have been with Jesus through his ministry and seen what he is capable of doing?

Is there anyone of the followers of Jesus who may be concerned and anxious about the risk that Jesus is taking? They all have heard the murmurings of those in power who feel threatened by him and his preaching. Is Mary of Magdala there walking with Jesus as she was one of the women who accompanied him during his ministry? What might she be feeling?

You are invited to take some time to engage in a “colloquy” or conversation with one of the bystanders or one of the followers of Jesus? How does what they have to say touch your heart and soul?

When you have finished this time of prayer, we suggest you keep a journal of your thoughts and feelings? Were there moments of consolation where you felt animated by the Spirit of God? Were there feelings of desolation where you felt more absence than presence?

Praying a Memory

Can you remember a liturgical experience of Palm Sunday that engaged you with its power and beauty? Was there a blessing of palms outdoors? Was there a procession of people waving their palms, reenacting this precious moment in the story of Jesus? Can you recapture the energy and excitement of this liturgical time and space? Do you remember what hymn was sung?

All Glory Laud and Honor? To the Son of David, Hosanna (We Are Marching)? Jerusalem, Our Destiny? Who were the members of the faith community gathered with you? Can you see their faces and hear their voices? How does the memory of last year’s absence of a public celebration of Palm Sunday affect a “modified” celebration this year?

Praying the Present

Although we will still not be able to enter into the celebration of Palm Sunday the way we have in the past, are you able to find in yourself a sense of hopefulness and gratitude for what we have, even if it is not what it was before? Can you enter into a “colloquy” i.e., a conversation with Jesus asking him for whatever it is you need at this time?

The Third Week of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius is an invitation to be present to Jesus as he experiences his final week of life? How has Jesus been present to you during this past year when grief and loss have been woven into the fabric of our daily lives? Has the world’s passion deepened your sense of God’s passionate love for the world and Jesus’ suffering and death on the Cross?

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Prayer for Passion Sunday

Loving and Gracious God

Through the eyes of the crucified One
Our eyes are opened to see,
The violence and turmoil in our world
May the passion of Christ
Teach us to be healers
Who bring peace and reconciliation to our world

Through the heart of the crucified One
Our hearts are opened to feel
the pain and suffering in our world
especially at this time of the Covid19 Virus
May the passion of Christ
Teach us to be lovers
Who live lives of compassion in our world

Through the hands of the Crucified One
Our hands are opened to reach out
To those who are in great physical and spiritual need
May the passion of Christ
Teach us to be servants
Who are willing to serve our brothers and sisters

We ask this in the Name of Jesus, Our Crucified and Risen Lord.

Passion Sunday Prayer

Creator God, your world is torn by the ravages of this new enemy
How heavy is this weight
Your children are separated from each other
How heavy is this weight
Our churches are empty of communities of faith.
How heavy is this weight
Your people cry out for healing and mercy
How heavy is this weight
Your precious world is burdened by the weight of illness and disease

And so you share with us your beloved Son, Jesus
The innocent one
His is the way to peace
His is the way to compassion
His is the way to forgiveness of the sins.
He is the one who bears the weight of this world
As he carries the wood of the cross

Creator God, we wait again for your love for the human community
We wait again for justice for victims of violence
We wait again for healing for those who are ill and affected by the virus
We wait for reconciliation for all peoples
We wait for the Risen Jesus
We wait for his spirit to lift up our world to You
As he was lifted up on the Cross.
Hear our prayer in his name who is with you now and forever.

Poems for Palm Sunday

The Poet Thinks About the Donkey

On the outskirts of Jerusalem
the donkey waited.
Not especially brave, or filled with understanding,
he stood and waited.

How horses, turned out into the meadow,
leap with delight!
How doves, released from their cages,
clatter away, splashed with sunlight.

But the donkey, tied to a tree as usual, waited.
Then he let himself be led away.
Then he let the stranger mount.

Never had he seen such crowds!
And I wonder if he at all imagined what was to happen.
Still, he was what he had always been: small, dark, obedient.

I hope, finally, he felt brave.
I hope, finally, he loved the man who rode so lightly upon him,
as he lifted one dusty hoof and stepped, as he had to, forward.

Mary Oliver from her book *Thirst*.

The Donkey

When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
Then surely I was born;
With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil's walking parody
On all four-footed things.
The tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.
Fools! For I also had my hour;
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.

G.K. Chesterton (1874–1936)