

PALM SUNDAY 2017
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
ST. MATTHEW 21.1-9



Jesus rides into the city on a donkey. The atmosphere of the crowd is electric. Everyone is shouting, "Praise to David's Son! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise be to God!

The whole city is thrown into an uproar. "Who is he?" the people asked. "He is Jesus the carpenter's son, from Nazareth in Galilee," the crowd answered.

What a spectacle it must have been. When the people saw Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey they remembered what the prophet Zechariah wrote 600 years earlier...

"...Look, your King is coming to you! He is humble and rides on a donkey and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Over the next few days the crowd's enthusiastic welcome for King Jesus will turn into outright hatred and a thirst for his blood. What made them turn against Jesus so quickly? What does this mean for us today?

Jesus' humble procession into the city stands in stark contrast to the processions of soldiers and government officials the people often witnessed. Heavily armed Roman soldiers riding horses and driving chariots struck fear into the hearts of the people. The message was clear..."We are in charge...don't mess with us!"

The people turned against Jesus because he was not the kind of king they were looking for...they wanted another King David. They wanted a military leader who would lead a revolution against the occupying Roman forces...and drive them out of Jerusalem forever.

King Jesus did not meet their expectations...his claim to being another kind of Savior only served to increase their hostility toward him. They didn't want to hear anything about turning their lives around and back toward God...they had to figure out a legal way to get him killed...by getting the Romans do their dirty work for them.

We just acted out Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem through our Procession around the church...and we proclaimed Jesus to be our King, just as Catholic Christians have been doing for

centuries. Just what should we expect from King Jesus?

Father Martin Hellriegel was a parish priest who served in Saint Louis, Missouri. He wrote our opening hymn *To Jesus Christ Our Sovereign King* in 1941. He had become increasingly alarmed at the rise of fascism in his native Germany. He wrote the hymn he hoped would inspire people to embrace Jesus as their Lord and King.

What kind of King is Jesus? In the words of the hymn...he is our Benign King. Jesus is THE King who is kind, approachable, gentle, sympathetic, compassionate, caring and benevolent. He is not out to do us harm. And he is the King who reigns now and forever.

Jesus is not like any ordinary human king and he is not an elected government official. He has done for us what no government or political party could possibly do no matter how well their intentions...he has done what he alone could do...make us his Saints and put us right with God.

In the Old Testament, God is THE King who loves his people and sent judges to rule over them and encourage them to be faithful. In the First Book of Kings, the people came to Samuel and said God wasn't good enough...they wanted a human king just like everyone else.

God told Samuel to give the people what they wanted. He told Samuel, "They are not rejecting you; they are rejecting me." He also told Samuel to tell the people they won't like their human king. He will be dishonest and lie to them and sign treaties with foreign powers. And they won't like the unfair taxes they will have to pay either.

The people got what they wanted. They got their human king. Some of their kings were good and had the best interests of the people in their hearts. Others forgot about God and made life miserable for the people.

Palm Sunday challenges us to respond to Jesus as Lord and King over every aspect of our lives...whether it's ordinary day-to-day life when we are likely to forget about God...or extraordinary times of difficulty when we feel lost or without hope.

Jesus...is our good and gracious King!

