

PALM SUNDAY 2018

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

ST. MATTHEW 21.1-9 HYMN #62 (H1940)



“...Look, your King is coming to you”...wrote the Prophet Zechariah 600 years before Jesus was born. “He is humble and rides on a donkey and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

We just proclaimed Jesus to be our King in a dramatic reenactment of the first Palm Sunday...just as Catholic Christians have done for centuries. We processed around the church with our palm branches and crosses. We sang...

...“All glory, laud and honor to you, Redeemer, King! To whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring”.

Palm Sunday begins a week of stark contrasts in the life of Jesus and in the Liturgical Life of Saint Joseph Parish. The people who lived in Jerusalem were used to the triumphant processions of heavily armed Roman soldiers riding horses and driving chariots through the streets. These processions were intended to convey the message Caesar was in charge...don't mess with him.

Jesus rides into the city on a donkey...a humble procession in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy. The crowd is hopeful this is a king like David...who would drive the occupying forces out...and give them their land back. Jesus, however...has another mission...he is a different kind of King.

Instead of gathering an army of angry citizens intent on taking back their homeland...Jesus makes his way to the Temple...God's house. There he finds the currency exchange office and merchants ripping off their own people with exorbitant exchange fees and inflated prices...unfair business practices are not anything new...and Jesus doesn't like what he sees.

“This is God's house...a house of prayer”, Jesus shouts quoting Jeremiah...“You have turned it into a hideout for robbers.” We know what happens next...Jesus overturned tables and sent people running. “Uh-oh”, said the crowd. “We got this guy all wrong”.

That was 2000 years ago...this is now. If we are to get anything out of the Palm Sunday story...and the liturgical reenactments of Holy Week...we must become the crowd welcoming King Jesus.

What kind of King is Jesus? Throughout the Old Testament...God is THE King who consistently shows his love for his people. When things got out of hand...he sent judges to rule over them and encourage them to be faithful. That wasn't good enough for God's people. They wanted a human king...they wanted to be just like everyone else...they wanted a king they could see.

We read in the First Book of Samuel...the people asked Samuel to give them a human king. God told Samuel to listen to the people and give them what they wanted. He told Samuel, “They are not rejecting you; they are rejecting me as their king.” He told Samuel to warn the people their human king would wage war and send their sons off to fight and die; he would force their daughters to work in the palace and cook for him; he will tax the people unfairly. The people didn't listen to Samuel...they got their human king.

The crowd on the first Palm Sunday wanted and expected a new King David. They wanted to reestablish their earthly kingdom. It's also true some of the religious leaders were happy with the cozy relationship they had with the Romans. They didn't want change. And none of them wanted a King who is God.

We are the same crowd...and the *sweet hosannas* we sang at the beginning of our Palm Sunday Liturgy...the triumphant procession and shouts of “Hail, King Jesus”...will soon turn to shouts of “crucify him”...we are the crowd of Matthew's Passion.

The stark contrasts of the Holy Week liturgies give us ample opportunity to pause and meditate on what this all means...why we do this every year...to remind ourselves Jesus did this for us and for the whole world...out of unconditional love.

Jesus continues the ride on his donkey into Jerusalem fully aware of what awaits him...it is a procession our closing hymn tells us is both lowly and majestic...we join the procession...we shout and we sing.

Today we embrace the hope that comes from declaring Jesus as God and Lord and King...over every aspect of our lives.

Jesus...is indeed our good and gracious King!

