

Palm Sunday 2023
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney

St. Matthew 21.1-9 Hymn #62 (H1940)



“Everybody loves a parade”...a phrase we often hear around Christmas, Easter, Independence Day and other days. Nobody is quite certain where the phrase originated...but many of us are drawn to a parade.

How about the Disneyland “Main Street Electrical Parade”...a spectacular display of light and sound...highly recommended for little kids and big kids of the adult kind at least once...maybe even twice...in one’s lifetime.

Today we had a parade of the religious kind. We processed around the church carrying palm branches and sang...

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

Like the Mass itself...our Palm Sunday Procession is a powerful teaching tool...we learn a truth about our faith...it helps us remember why we are here today.

The first Palm Sunday over 2000 years ago began with a parade...Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey...a humble procession in fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy written 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.”

What kind of king rides into the city on a donkey? Kings ride horses...symbolizing the strong army that backs them up. Soldiers ride horses. Jesus rides a donkey...a symbol of peace the world cannot provide. His parade is not part of some military campaign. His campaign is one of redemption and forgiveness.

When he enters the city, Jesus head straight for the Temple...God’s house. He is angry to find the currency exchange office charging exorbitant fees for their services. He is angry to find the merchants selling animals and produce used in Temple sacrifices at inflated prices. He would soon become the true sacrificial lamb.

Jesus quotes Jeremiah when he overturns the merchants tables and tells them they have turned

God’s house...a house of prayer...into a hideout for robbers.

What kind of King were the people expecting? We read in the First Book of Samuel how the people were tired of having God as their King. They wanted a human king just like everyone else. They wanted a king they could see and hear and touch. God told Samuel if the people wanted a human king to give them what they wanted. God told Samuel...

...“The people are not rejecting you...they are rejecting me as their King.”

God then told Samuel to tell the people what they should expect from their human king. They can expect him to draft their sons and send them off to war to fight and die. They can expect him to force their daughters to work in the palace and cook and clean and make it smell nice. They can expect to be unfairly taxed and have their land confiscated. The people didn’t pay attention to what Samuel was saying...they got their human king.

The crowd on the first Palm Sunday threw palm branches and coats down on the road as Jesus passed by on his donkey. They were looking for another military leader like King David. They wanted to be liberated from the Roman occupation. They would soon turn on Jesus when he failed to meet their expectations.

What part do we play in this drama? We just processed around the church and called Jesus, David’s royal Son. We called him our Redeemer. We called him our good and gracious King. But what kind of King is Jesus to us...he is God and King and Sacrifice. He shows us God’s unconditional love. His ride on the donkey...his suffering and death...his Resurrection and Ascension...wasn’t for himself...it was for us. That’s the kind of King we have in Jesus.

Today we continue walking along side Jesus as he rides on the donkey to finish the mission God committed to him. He rides on in lowly pomp...the hymn tells us...to die. And then Jesus, our God and King...will take the power that belongs to him...and reign forever.

We love our Palm Sunday Parade...and we declare without any hesitation...Jesus is indeed our good and gracious King!

