

## **Palm Sunday 2020**

Palm Sunday is the beginning of Holy Week, which brings us a series of events that lead to the Resurrection on Easter Sunday. This Palm Sunday represents a preparation which is both symbolic or allegorical and historical.

Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. People lay garments in his path and wave palm branches in celebration. These palm branches are a symbol of victory, a triumph before the beginning of the battle. These people seem to see beyond the humble appearance of Jesus to his divine reality. The same men and women would be crying “Crucify him! Crucify him!” just a few days later. They expected a worldly king of this world to liberate them from the Roman occupation.

The facts are related in this first Gospel at the beginning of the ceremony of blessing the palms, but what is important for us is this contrast between spiritual insight and expectations in worldly terms. This is the point where politics lose their relevance and where we need to transcend the worldly expectations we have in our own time. The palm branches we receive on this day will symbolise our own and each other’s light and participation in this transcendent kingship of Christ.

This light in us is obscured by conventional and mundane ways of thought and perceiving reality. We want our light to shine beyond ourselves that we may be recognised by the world. Our striving will then be in vain. We often live life as a false or masked personality. How ironic that we will shortly be required to wear masks in public because of the virus! This time, the mask will not only protect us from disease and others from catching it from us should we become infected, but will also make our social life less dependent on facial expressions. We will all be made autistic!

“Let your light shine”... We have not to try to show our light or fear the consequences of being men and women of light. We are here to light the world, as we read in the Prologue of St John. Where there is no light, there is darkness. This light is our limpidity and our consciousness. We are called to be true to ourselves and to God. Sometimes, we have to be prudent and remain in obscurity until “our hour” has come.

We have to live this inner light as the drama of man's hatred grows around us. Like in that first Holy Week, we have to live through our uncertain times whether we are afraid of the disease or the future in terms of money, jobs and livelihoods. The very life of some will be on the line as they pass from health to a death by pneumonia.

Normally, many people attend church on Palm Sunday. Here in France, many go to church for their palms which they take to the cemeteries to lay on the graves of their loved ones. The palm represents hope as well as victory. Not so this year, many clergy who are used to celebrating the ceremonies in full will not attempt them alone. I too simplify the procession because it makes no sense for a priest alone in his place of worship. I stand in the middle of the choir with my palm to sing *Gloria laus* and *Ingrediente*. This is a tragic and anxious year. It is not only the invisible virus, but our worries – and our grief for our loved ones who went to hospital and ended up in an anonymous coffin in an improvised morgue awaiting burial or cremation. These people die alone, far from their grieving families.

There is the expression “No cross, no crown”, and as in time of war, the victory will come only after a time when hope is nearly extinguished and no end is in sight. The coming Cross represents the suffering of us all. For most of us, we suffer our confinement in our homes. Some will catch the disease and a small percentage will die or be marked for life with damaged lungs and immune systems. We can live through such a trial only with that light of Christ within us.

Holy Week will remind us that our suffering is not without hope or a light at the end of the winding road. The end of this journey is resurrection and glory, the victory over death and sin, a new life. May God bless and keep you from the disease and from all the changes and chances of this sinful world.