

## **Palm (SJ&QA) Sunday Year B**

A large crowd welcomes Jesus as He triumphantly enters Jerusalem, spreading their cloaks on the road and cutting branches from trees and casting them in his path. The crowd is delirious with joy shouting, '*Hosanna.*' But sad to know they are the same people after only few days that demanded his death. How changeable the human mind is. Who would have thought that the crowd who welcomed Jesus with the red carpet during his entry into Jerusalem would turn against him faster than snow melting in hell? Their welcome and shouts were superficial. Their support for him was only skin deep. The crowd did a 180 degrees turnabout from '*hail to the king*' to defiantly shouting, '*Crucify Him.*' Little by little the initial joy disappears into the distance and we closely follow the death march to Calvary.

It was easy to be part of a crowd that welcomed Jesus and it was easy to be part of a crowd that condemned him to death. It is easy to be part of the crowd that celebrates the Sunday Mass and receives Holy Communion. It is easy to listen to homilies and know the Church's teachings but how easy it is to turn a blind eye when life confronts us. *Are you willing to walk with Jesus on the road to Calvary?* It is sad to think when faced with challenges and difficulties often we turn our backs on Him. My seminary spiritual director used to say, "*Life is full of ups and downs, during the ups glorify God and during the downs fully trust in Him.*"

The passion story spells out the last events in the earthly life of Jesus and makes clear the price he paid for our sins. Many times Jesus revealed himself as Messiah through his words and miracles. Now he reveals himself as Son of God and of Man through His sufferings. The passion is the supreme struggle of Jesus; it ratified everything He had said and done during the three years of His ministry. He is a *'man for others.'* He lives his message of radical love for God and neighbor, of humble service and sacrifice for others—even for one's enemies. Intent on making one last call to the Jews to heed his message, Jesus proceeds to Jerusalem. This He does knowing quite well He can be killed at the instigation of the high priest, the scribes and the Pharisees. He goes to Jerusalem where prophets have met a tragic end, not because *He does not value his life but because He values ours more.* And just as Jesus lives for others, so does He die for others. He sees His death as the means by which God will once again gather and definitively save everyone. His last meal with his disciples is a pledge that the Father will vindicate Him and bring Him and His followers to the kingdom. Jesus asks his disciples to share His cup not only to signify their fellowship with Him in His death but that they may share in the glory of the resurrection.

In His final hour Jesus intercedes for His enemies, saying: *"Father, forgive them, they know not what they are doing"* It is not in vain that he lives and dies for others. And this is why though Jesus is rejected by the world in life and in death — *"God does not put him to shame,"* as the prophet Isaiah in the first reading proclaimed. Feeling abandoned by all,

in his loneliness Jesus reached out for companionship and support but there was nothing here to comfort him. His death on the cross reminds us that here is a God towards whom we journey and whose friendship we seek. The cross, which is the ultimate expression of the world's rejection of Jesus, is in reality the fulfillment of God's loving plan of Salvation. *Satan's plan is to break and destroy us, the Lord's plan is to save and restore us.* To all who dare to stand up with Him, Jesus gives His assurance as He said to the repentant thief... "*Today you will be with me in paradise.*" Every Christian becomes aware that in his own life he has to meet the same fate as Jesus. We must join in His suffering and death in order to share his glory.

This final week of Lent offers us an opportunity to bring the hell out of our hearts and minds and come into harmony with our Lord. As we enter into Holy Week and into the Holy Triduum, what Jesus is asking of us is to stay close to Him as we recall His suffering and death. Jesus suffered and died to save us because of His love for us. *Suffering and dying without love is futile and worthless.* There is no great love that comes without sacrifice—that is just the way love is. In meditating and uniting ourselves with Jesus in His suffering and death, may we also offer up our lives to Him and die to ourselves so that we will discover the meaning of love and sacrifice. Let us allow the love of Jesus to surround us so that we will be able to offer our lives for the salvation of others. Jesus did it and we can do it too. May we always remain faithful witnesses to that cross in our daily lives. Amen!