

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Year B

Is 50:4-7

Ps 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24

Phil 2:6-11

Mk 14:1—15:47 or 15:1-39

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The most tragic words in the New Testament are those which St. John sets down in the beginning of his gospel: "He came unto his own and his own received him not." Bethlehem had no room for him when he was born, Nazareth had no room for him when he lived and Jerusalem had no room for him when he died.

Palm Sunday signifies the moment, the first giant step when the king took possession of the only kingdom he would ever have upon this earth - the royal kingdom of the cross.

The Lord is a hunted criminal. The police at an earlier episode refused to arrest him. But he goes boldly into the city of Jerusalem, in fulfillment of the prophet Zechariah: "See your king coming to you riding on an ass."

We Americans find it difficult to grasp the pageantry attached to the coronation of a ruler. We see it in movies and read about it in books, usually a medieval or modern king or queen. We think of the king in a golden carriage, cheering subjects, colorful processions and the large vaulted Cathedral where the king or queen is crowned ruler of an earthly kingdom.

We look in vain for such pomp in the procession which enters Jerusalem today. The king is Christ, the carpenter of Nazareth. There is no golden carriage but a donkey. The spectators are not the lords and ladies of the land but the common folk and the fishermen. The crown will be one of thorns. The "Hosannas!" will die out, the Lord's favor with the people will fade. The palms of popularity will not soften the harsh path of duty.

The Christ who was born in a cave, carried across a desert, reared in a village, tempted on a mountain, baptized in a river, walked on a lake, and was betrayed in a garden, is about to die on an obscure hill. God is visiting His people - but they do not recognize Him.

Christ leaves the city at sunset, goes to the opposite hill and looks down on Jerusalem and weeps profusely. Three times in his life he wept. First, at the death of Lazarus, his close friend. Second, in the garden of Gethsemane. And third, over the city of Jerusalem.

The temple of Jerusalem was on the opposite hill. It took up about 30 acres...the front of the building was all in pure gold...when the sun hit it looked like a burning flame of beauty...The apostles said...look at that building...look at those stones...and Christ says, with tears in his eyes, Oh, Jerusalem! How often I would have gathered you to myself as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings. But you have not known the time of your visitation.

Today is the day of our visitation. Now is the hour of our Lord's coming. He found no room in the inn, no welcome in Nazareth, no place in the city of his ancestors, no loyalty in the hearts of his followers, no lasting praise in the hearts of the crowds, no recognition from the leaders of the Jews or the Romans. Let us pray that he finds room in our hearts, a welcome in our homes, a place in our lives, loyalty in our hearts and lasting praise on our lips and recognition in our deeds.