

Homily of Palm Sunday, Year A, 2026

Matthew 21: 1-11; Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22:8-9, 17-20, 23-24; Philippians 2:6-11; Matthew 26:14-27:66

Today, Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord, is the sixth and last Sunday of Lent. It commemorates the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, days before he was crucified. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week. The passion narrative from the Gospel of Matthew invites us, once again, to participate step by step in the passion journey of Jesus Christ, which we began with our participation in the Stations of the Cross.

Almost all Jewish prophets prophesied the coming of the messiah who would redeem Israel from her oppressors. At the time of Jesus, Israel was governed by the Romans. Jesus' disciples were convinced that Jesus was a political messiah who would lead a rebellion against the Roman colonial rule and drive out the Romans. Therefore, on arriving in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, he was given a rousing and heroic welcome: "The very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and strewed them on the road. The crowds preceding him and those following kept crying out and saying: 'Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest'" (Matthew 21:8-9).

John's Gospel is specific about palm branches: "They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna!' 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Blessed is the king of Israel!'" (John 12:13). The name 'Palm Sunday' is based on John's Gospel. In many cultures, waving of palm branches is an expression of victory. 'Hosanna' is an Aramaic word which means, "save us, we pray" or "please deliver us." Unknowingly, the crowds proclaimed Jesus' victory over death and him as the savior of the world. Like the crowds, we pray to Jesus to save us and deliver us from our afflictions.

Palm Sunday celebration is not only a re-enacting of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, but we are also re-enacting the vision of John in Revelation 7:9-10, "I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb.'" Our celebration is our prayer that we will transcend from re-enacting to reality and from performance to become what we perform.

There are other meanings of Palm leaves. In some cultures, in times of crisis or misunderstanding, carrying palm leaves or presenting palm leaves is a gesture of peace and reconciliation. Today, the Church gives us palm leaves, as a symbol of peace and reconciliation to take to our homes and places. Let us share the message of peace and reconciliation with one another. You may take a palm leaf from this Mass to someone as a gesture of peace and reconciliation. Blessed palm leaves are not to be thrown around or

discarded as trash. They are kept reverently until next year when they are returned to the church and burned and the ashes used during Ash Wednesday liturgy.

I do not think that the crowds would have cried to Jesus to save them if they knew that he was not a political messiah. A few days later, the crowds shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" It could be that the crowds were frustrated and disappointed that Jesus did not meet their expectation. If Jesus had overthrown the Roman leadership, the crowds would have stood behind him. He would not have been crucified. Are we the same? When our expectations are not met, how do we react? Do we enter crucifying mode?

As we read in the gospel, Jesus entered Jerusalem riding a colt (a young donkey). Jesus chose to enter Jerusalem on a donkey, which was, at that time, the means of transportation for the poor; instead of a horse, which was the means of transportation for the rich, the high and the mighty. By riding a donkey, a beast of burden, Jesus made himself our 'beast of burden' thereby fulfilling Isaiah 53:54, "He took up our pain and bore our suffering." Like the donkey, Jesus carries our pains and sufferings.

By riding a donkey, Jesus identified himself with the poor and the lowly, and he teaches us to do the same. He wants us to identify with the burdened, the needy, the sick, and the suffering. And by riding a donkey, Jesus teaches us the importance of detachment and humility. In Matthew 11:29, Jesus says, "Learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart."

Today's celebration becomes even more meaningful if Jesus makes a triumphal entry into our lives, grant us peace, victory over evil, salvation, and eternal life. Let us not stop Jesus' entry into our lives by our sins. Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, then I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me" (Revelations 3:20).

Lastly, St. Andrew of Crete writes, "Let us imitate those who have gone out to meet him, not scattering olive branches or garments or palms in his path, but spreading ourselves before him as best as we can with humility of soul and upright purpose ... It is ourselves that we must spread under Christ's feet..."

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