

## Homily: Palm Sunday 2021

500 years before the original Palm Sunday, the prophet Zechariah wrote, “Rejoice heart and soul, daughter of Zion! Shout with gladness, daughter of Jerusalem! See now, your King comes to you; He is victorious, He is triumphant, humble and riding on a donkey.” It’s not difficult to see why the Gospel writers connected this prophecy with the Lord’s entry into Jerusalem. Jesus comes into the holy city today in a scene that resembles a triumphant victory procession; yet He is humble, riding on a donkey. Humble and victorious – this is our Lord. We will clearly see both His humility and His victory in the coming week.

There’s another time when we think of Jesus riding on a donkey: on the journey to Bethlehem in the days before His birth. Many Christmas images show Mary sat upon a donkey, carrying Jesus in her womb. Then, Jesus was riding into Bethlehem to be born. Today, He rides into Jerusalem to die. The crowds now acclaim this humble King as “the Son of David”, a title given to the Messiah; just as then He entered Bethlehem, the “city of David”, where He was to be born. Bethlehem was busy then; many people were coming to be counted in the census. Jerusalem is busy now, as the city throngs with visitors coming to celebrate the Passover. Then, there was no room at the inn for Jesus; in the coming days, He will be rejected again, by the authorities, by the crowds demanding His crucifixion, by those who mock Him during His trial and execution.

And what about us? Jesus comes to us in the same way: triumphant yet humble. This week, He conquers sin and death for us, yet He comes in ways which are gentle, and filled with humility. We too can accept Him or close the door to Him. He does not force us to accept Him or His gift of salvation. Those who welcomed Jesus laid their garments on His colt and even on the road before Him, showing Him incredible honour; those who rejected Him stripped Him of His own garments and did everything they could to take away His dignity. How will we allow the Lord to touch our lives this week? Will we honour Him by our love and devotion, by our desire to turn our hearts more fully to Him in love? Or will we be slow to receive Him, will we resist His grace? Will we deny the Lord the dignity He deserves, pride of place in our hearts? Or will we allow Him to be victorious in us?

Today the crowds cry “Hosanna” as the Lord enters Jerusalem. It’s a word we know well, and use at every Mass, proclaiming, as they did, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” And after these words, the humble but victorious Lord comes into our midst again, in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. The word “Hosanna” had become for the Jewish people a word of praise, a heartfelt adoration of the Lord; and so it is for us. But its original meaning in Hebrew is “Save us!” Hosanna, then, is a cry for salvation that became a joyful shout of praise. Could there be any better word for us to have in our hearts and on our lips this week? In these days of Holy Week the whole world cries out to Christ, “Save us!” and He answers our prayer, taking our sins and our sufferings upon Himself. And because He does this for us, our cry for help becomes a joyful outpouring of praise. The journey of Holy Week is contained in this word. We begin this week knowing our need of salvation, our need of a Saviour. We will end it with the praise and thanksgiving owed to our risen Lord, the humble but victorious King who conquers death for our salvation.