

***Homily for Palm Sunday 2018***  
***2 Snap Shots of Palm Sunday***

When people go on holiday many of us take more photographs than at any other time of the year, so we can remember these significant events. I have entitled this morning's homily

***"2 Snap Shots of Palm Sunday"***

because I want to present two pictures of Jesus the Church has remembered now for two millennia.

**1. The Snap Shot of the Crowd.**

We read in Mark 11.8:

***And many spread their garments on the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields.***

Luke tells us: "there was a whole multitude of disciples gathered on Palm Sunday"and Matthew writes:

**And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting**

This tells us the multitude included the disciples yes. However, the audience was composed of more than just the disciples. As we look at this snap shot of the crowd, I want to ask two questions:

**Why was there a crowd?**

**Why were they waiting at what was known the Golden Gate (Eastern Gate) when there are so many gates that led into the city of Jerusalem?**

Another way to look at this is to ask:

***How did the crowd know to come to this gate on this day?***

There were 360 days in the Jewish calendar. Did somebody wake up that day and have a hunch that this was a good day to gather at the Golden Gate? Was this a flash mob that someone got together with tweets and face book messages announcing:

***"The Messiah may show up today, and just in case he does let's get some palm branches and head for the Eastern Gate".***

No, it was not like this at all. Four days before the Passover was the day known as:

***The Procession for the Passover Lamb.***

Each year the High Priest would go to Bethlehem and he would go to a certain field set aside for the Passover Lambs. These are the lambs the shepherds were tending on the night of the Nativity when the angel appeared to them and announced:

***“Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; <sup>11</sup>for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.***

This Lamb had to be as white as snow and without any defect or blemish. Once the High Priest had chosen the Lamb, he put it over his shoulders and carried it into the City of Jerusalem through the Eastern Gate. Picture in this snapshot the crowd gathered at the Eastern Gate as they wait to see the Passover Lamb carried in by the High Priest. Perhaps the people were saying to each other:

***There is the priest and the perfect lamb worthy to die for us. Here is a Lamb that is worthy to cover our sins.***

But look again at the snapshot. Who is that coming in through the Eastern Gate? Why it is none other than Jesus. Riding in on the heels of this great procession we see Jesus the Lamb of God carried in through the Eastern Gate on the exact day the people were expecting the Passover Lamb to be brought into the city. On that day Jesus came, the true Lamb of God who takes away the Sin of the World.

Added to this are these verses from Psalm 118 where we read:

***This is the gate of the Lord, the righteous will enter through it.... This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.***

Then listen to the words concluding the Psalm:

***Save us, we beg you, O LORD!  
O LORD, we beg you, give us success!  
<sup>26</sup> Blessed be he who enters in the name of the LORD!  
We bless you from the house of the LORD.  
<sup>27</sup> The LORD is God,  
and he has given us light.  
Bind the festal procession with branches,  
up to the horns of the altar!***

Here the Palm Sunday theme? Entering in through the gate... Save us which can also be stated as Hosanna. On this day Jesus fulfills Psalm 118.

What is the significance of this snapshot? It is this. God uses customs to mark Holy Days for his own end. For many of the people in that crowd they would not have seen the significance of who Jesus was and what he was doing. But, for those who could see the significance, this day became

one marked by such a special importance that all these centuries later it is remembered every Palm Sunday.

Our faith is expressed with rituals that can seem to have little meaning to many or they can be infused with the kind of understanding which enhances our love for Jesus all the more. Rituals are never intended to be ends in and of themselves, rather they are always to point to Jesus, the one who on the day of the Procession of the Passover Lamb turned it into the Procession of the Lamb of God, who is the Son of God.

## **2. The Snap Shot of the Kingly Entrance:**

We have seen that the Passover Lamb had to be carried in through the gate. So too was the Lamb of God. He could have easily walked into the city but then the symbolism of the Lamb being carried would have been lost. However, there is more to this than the importance of Jesus needing to be carried.

I want to talk with you about the mode of transportation Jesus chose. He could have ridden on a camel or a horse into the city so the question is:

### ***Why did he choose to ride in on a donkey?***

To answer this, we need to see how animals were used among kings at the time of Jesus. This understanding will give us deeper insight as to why this snapshot has Jesus coming in on a donkey.

I need to explain something to you of the rules of war as practiced in the time of Jesus for you to appreciate this picture.

Israel was a strategic place in the Middle East. It was fought over then just as it is fought over now. There were nations North of Israel and South. They would come and attack each other. Israel was always in the middle.

If you were a person living in Jerusalem and you came out of the market place and there was a vast army on the horizon you would ask yourself two questions:

#### ***1. Is that king coming with this army to fight us and attack us?***

*or*

#### ***2. Is he coming to refuel and then move onto his destination?***

There was a convention practiced in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century that would help to let people know. If the king was coming on a Mission of Peace and was simply coming to refuel and let his soldiers rest a while, he would come into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Jesus came in on a donkey because his mission was a mission of peace to reconcile people to God.

What if he was not coming on a mission of peace, but one of war? What if you came out of the market and you saw a king sitting on a horse, what would it mean then? It meant that a king was coming to make war with his army behind him.

Note this please.

The first time Jesus came he came, he came lowly and meek riding on a donkey to make peace. However, listen to what the Bible says about the next time Jesus will come to Jerusalem. In Revelation 19:11 we read:

***Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.<sup>1</sup>***

This second snap shot tells us something very important about Jesus. The age we live in now is the age of grace where the Prince of Peace invites all people to come to him and accept him as the true and eternal king. His coming is in humility and so people can choose to ignore him or accept him for who he truly is.

However, the day will come when no one can ignore Jesus. For he will come on a white horse and He will make war and judge all his enemies.

Therefore, all of life is to be lived with gratitude for his mercy and peaceful first coming. But, do not let this lull you into indifference. He will come again to judge the nations of the world. We live in a universe and a world where there is ultimate justice because the King who can judge is the Word of God, who is faithful and true.

May we enter into this Holy Week realizing we have a part in the unfolding drama of God's saving work as we ponder these snap shots of the Palm Sunday crown and donkey.

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible\*](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Re 19:11). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

