

Lent 6A – Palm/Passion Sunday (4/17/11 – *Seeing Jesus, the Son of God, Lifted Up*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

In the two readings we have heard today from St. John's Gospel, there are a wide variety of people ... and just as many activities going on. It can all be a bit overwhelming and confusing, perhaps. But then, that is *Holy Week*. The number of people and events that took place in the life of our Savior those last days before His death and resurrection are almost too much to take in and make sense of. Yet we should ... we must try.

We have the crowd of people who follow Jesus from Bethany – where Jesus raised His dear friend, Lazarus, from his tomb of four days in the previous chapter. They know just what Jesus can do. They know that the signs Jesus performs are signs of the Messiah. That is why they follow Jesus to Jerusalem ... to the Passover Feast that is about to take place. In that crowd – coming from Bethany with Jesus – are the disciples, of course. They have seen the Savior perform a great many miracles – but none like the one we heard last week ... none like the raising of a man four days in the grave. They are among those who take the palm branches of victory to both wave and cast upon the dusty road, crying out: *Hosanna! Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!* [JN 12.13]

Then we have another crowd of people coming out from Jerusalem. This crowd has also heard about Jesus' resurrection of Lazarus. Some of them were present at the time. A great many only heard the witness of those who had seen it happen. But they, too, seemed convinced – at least for the moment – that this Jesus is the long-promised Messiah ... the One to sit upon King David's throne. They likewise cast their palm branches in the street and wave them in the air. And they likewise shout the messianic acclamation: *Hosanna! Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!*

There is a third group present that *Palm Sunday* beginning of *Holy Week*. It consists of the Jewish leaders – the Scribes and Pharisees and other members of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish Council). Now in this group there is a distinction. There are *many even of the authorities* who *believed in* Jesus, *but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they be put out of the synagogue; for*

they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God [JN 12.42–43] – Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, to name two. Most of the leaders, however, did **not** believe in Jesus. And in exercising their leadership, they persecuted anyone and everyone who sided with Jesus. They are those who desired to have Jesus out of the way ... completely. From the moment they heard of Jesus raising Lazarus and the multitude following after Him, they *made plans to put Him to death* [11.53]. For they had determined with Caiaphas *that it is better that one Man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish* [11.50].

There is a fourth group that comes on the scene – *some Greeks among those going up to worship at the Feast* [12.20]. These were “God-fearers” as they were called – Gentiles who had heard enough from the Law and the Prophets to believe that the God of Israel and His promised Messiah was the one true God. You see, God’s Word never returns to Him void. It accomplishes His purpose – even when it is spoken by imperfect people who continually falter and keep falling into sin. God has used the dispersion of His people – and even their times of captivity when He Himself punished them for their mixed faith and unbelief – to begin drawing people from among the Gentile nations to Himself. These Greeks had also heard about Jesus ... and desired to see Him [12.21]. Had they also heard about the miraculous resurrection ... or about some of Jesus’ other miraculous signs ... or simply about His teaching on the coming Kingdom present in the midst of Israel in His Own Person?

These different groups of people with their different responses and actions force us to ask ourselves some questions. *Where do I fit into this? Am I like any number of the fickle crowd – who one day are shouting “Hosannas” but six days later shout just as vehemently, “Crucify Him”?* *Am I like the disciples who flee and leave Jesus alone in Gethsemane when times of difficulty come? Am I like Peter, who denied Christ three times? Am I like some of those Jewish leaders who believed in Jesus but did not have the backbone to stand up and confess Him? Am I like Judas the betrayer ... or Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin who deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and put Him to death?*

I suppose each of us could try to analyze ourselves and place ourselves in

one particular category. But I really think we should simply see ourselves in each of them. Do I deny Christ – if not in my worship (or lack of it) then by my words and actions ... or at least my sinful thoughts? Am I fickle in my faith – sometimes strong ... but mostly weak ... and too easily silenced by the unbelieving world? We each fall into these sins – sometimes ... too often ... daily even. Then we excuse ourselves like Pilate – ***I am innocent of this Man's Blood*** [MT 27.24]. It is for **your** sins and for **mine** that the Almighty Son of God enters so humbly and meekly into Jerusalem – and will stand like a Lamb silent before His shearers, not opening His mouth [ISA 53.7] when He is condemned for our iniquities.

Lament your sin – and repent. But remember also that it is precisely in our Savior's ***Passion*** – in His act of humble and loving self-sacrifice upon the His Cross – that ***the Son of Man*** is ***glorified***. For ***truly, truly ... unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit*** [JN 12.23b-24]. Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man, will ***hate His life in this world to keep it for eternal life*** [12.25]. He willingly loses His life so that we also may have eternal life. It is ***for this purpose*** that He has ***come to this hour*** [12.27]. In this way the Father glorifies His Name [12.28].

When Christ your dear Savior is ***lifted up from the earth*** upon His Cross, ***the judgment of this world*** – and of **your** sin and **mine** – comes to pass. When the Son of God is suspended between heaven and earth upon the beams of the that accursed tree ... arms outstretched in love for us, then ***will the ruler of this world*** – satan – ***be cast out*** ... and the Son ***will draw all people to Himself*** ... and to His heavenly Father [12.31-32].

For unlike we who so often fail to believe God's Word – our eyes blinded to the beauty of God's Self-revelation and our hearts hardened against His will – we hear Christ our dear Lord say in our *Old Testament* lesson:

The Lord God has opened My ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I gave My back to those who strike, and My cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not My face from disgrace and spitting. But the Lord God helps Me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set My face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. [ISA 50.5-7]

Your Savior goes willingly ... knowingly to the place where He will be utterly rejected. The *Triumphal Entry* is joyous and glorious, to be sure. But understand just what His entry into Jerusalem means ... and wherein is His glory ... His victory ... and therefore your true joy. Christ your loving Lord goes valiantly, yet humbly, forward into His *Holy Week* battle ... to bear in His Body and take away the sins of the whole world. He will not turn back. He will never retreat. He gives His back to be scourged. His face will be struck and spit upon. The world – because of our sin ... and the venom of the evil one – will attempt to disgrace the Son of God to the utmost. But the Son has *set His face like flint* for the task of our redemption ... and He *shall not be put to shame*. He will reign victorious ... even hanging there upon the Cross. For He is *the King of Israel* – and of all creation in heaven and on earth – *Who comes in the Name of the Lord. Blessed is He!*

And blessed are **we** in **HIM!** For by His death and glorious resurrection, He has given **us HIS** victory over sin, death, devil, and hell. Our own shouts of *Hosanna* – help now ... save now – have been heard.

Therefore, we may sing with repentant joy that ancient hymn of the humiliation and glorification of Christ our Lord:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the Name that is above every name, so that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. [PHI 2.5-11]

For *Christ remains forever* ... even though He *must be lifted up* [JN 12.34]. And He is your Light in the darkness of this sinful and sin-plagued world. In the light of His Gospel, you are made to be *sons of light* [12.37] ... in this life ... and for life everlasting.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]