

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Phil 2:8-9

Christ became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name.



Gospel at the procession with palms

Mark 11:1-10; L37B (John 12:12-16 may also be read.)

When Jesus and his disciples drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately on entering it, you will find a colt tethered on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone should say to you, 'Why are you doing this?' reply, 'The Master has need of it and will send it back here at once.'" So they went off and found a colt tethered at a gate outside on the street, and they untied it.

Continued in Appendix A, p. 278.

Gospel at Mass Mark 14:1-15:47; L38B or Mark 15:1-39; L38B in *Appendix A*, pp. 278-281.

Reflecting on the Gospel

How quickly praise can turn to derision. We see it in business, politics, even with friends and family. One minute somebody is singing praises, the next it's insults and scorn. The gospel readings display that very juxtaposition today. We come into church singing "Hosanna!" and fifteen minutes later we cry, "Crucify him!"

The people wanted an earthly king to shake off Roman occupation and achieve political independence. But how quickly they turned on Jesus when they realized that he would not fulfill their plans. God had something else in store.

As Jesus did not meet the expectations of the crowd, or even his disciples, they turned and fled. One disciple ran so fast he ran out of his clothes (Mark 14:51-52)! Peter, of course, denied he even knew Jesus. The crowd chose to have an insurrectionist released to them rather than Jesus. By the time Jesus was on the cross the only remaining friends were some women and Joseph of Arimathea, though it seems Jesus wouldn't have known about Joseph's act of courage. The women were said to have ministered to him and followed him when he was in Galilee. Though the women lacked the "disciple" title, they were clearly his followers, offering a ministry of presence up to and during his death and subsequent burial. They stand in contrast to the behavior of the "real" disciples (those who bear the name) who denied Jesus, or simply fled the scene.

The entire passion narrative in Mark shows the confusion, bewilderment, and misunderstanding that punctuated the horrific scene of Jesus' crucifixion. The crowds believe Jesus is calling for Elijah, the chief priests and scribes mock Jesus as one who cannot save himself, Pilate acquiesces to the crowd's demands and participates in a miscarriage of justice. The centurion alone (a Gentile) is the only one to face the crucified after death and proclaim faith in him. Peter (a Jew, confessed Jesus as Christ (Mark 8:29) and now the centurion (a Gentile) confesses Jesus as Son of God, only after his death. To be the Christ, the Son of God, necessarily means suffering and death. To have come down from the cross would have been to deny Jesus' own identity as Christ and Son of God. Rather than a political military leader commanding armies in a revolution, Jesus is the crucified Son of God, Messiah. God's plans are not our own.

Living the Paschal Mystery

We are fickle human beings, often in search of entertainment. We are designed by eons of evolution to look toward the future rather than the past. Palm Sunday is our conscious effort to root ourselves in our past, the very foundation of our faith, the paschal mystery. This week we celebrate the most ancient and fundamental mysteries of faith. Without this effort to reach our touchstone we would likely be fleeting from one moment to the next, seeking to fulfill various desires and cravings. Being in touch with the paschal mystery reminds us that this life has meaning beyond the here and now. We have a future that is eternal. The love, relationships, and bonds we create in this life will endure. The passion and death of Jesus necessarily result in his resurrection, which gives us a promise and foretaste of that eternal life. Rather than seek the next best thing, upon entering this Holy Week we recall that our faith is rooted in the past, and our destiny is eternal.

Focusing the Gospel

The Blessing and Procession of Palms: Mark 11:1-10 or John 12:12-16

It was the custom for pilgrims to enter Jerusalem on foot. Only great kings and rulers would "ride" into the city, and usually on great steeds. In *Mark's* gospel, Jesus, the King of the new Jerusalem, chooses to ride into the city not on a majestic stallion (associated with war) but on the back of a young colt (a sign of

humility and peace) in what was likely a conscious effort on Jesus' part to call to mind the prophecy of Zechariah five centuries before (see Zech 9:9).

The story of Jesus' entry into the city is essentially the same in all four gospels. The entire narratives of Mark, Matthew, and Luke all lead to Jesus' coming to Jerusalem; but in *John's* shorter account, Jesus' Palm Sunday entry is actually his third trip to Jerusalem. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is enthusiastically welcomed by the crowds, many of whom had heard about his raising of Lazarus. John specifically refers to Zechariah's prophecy. The crowd's welcome of Jesus with *Hosannas* ("God save us") and palm branches is taken from the concluding verses of Psalm 118.

The Passion: Mark 14:1–15:47

Mark portrays the anguish of Jesus, abandoned by friends and disciples and resigned to his fate. He submits to arrest; he offers no response to the false accusations made against him; he makes no reply to Pilate. When asked if he is the Messiah, Jesus replies, "I am," and speaks of his glory to come; to Pilate's question as to whether he is "the king of the Jews," he says only, "You say so." Jesus' response to the chief priests contrasts the different understandings the rulers of Judaism have of the Messiah; Jesus' answer to Pilate shows the great chasm between the "peace" of Roman rule and the "peace" of God's kingdom.

Mark pointedly portrays the disciples' failure to provide any support to Jesus. The "last" disciple who flees naked into the night when Jesus is arrested is a powerful symbol in Mark's gospel of the disciples who left family and friends behind to follow Jesus but now leave everything behind to get away from him.

Focusing the First Reading

Isa 50:4-7

Isaiah preached hope and perseverance to the Jews who were exiled from Jerusalem and their homeland by the Assyrians seven hundred years before Christ. Isaiah is the prophet of "Emmanuel," the first major prophet to envision what Jesus will call the "kingdom of God." In four passages, known as the Servant Songs, Isaiah describes this figure who will restore Israel's covenant with God. The first reading for Palm Sunday is the third of these songs. The prophet portrays the servant-redeemer as a devoted teacher of God's word who is ridiculed and abused by those who are threatened by his teaching.

Focusing the Responsorial Psalm

Ps 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24 (2a)

Psalm 22, Jesus' last cry of abandonment, is today's response. The psalms were the song book of Judaism and faithful Jews would know its hymns by heart. Onlookers would have immediately recognized the words to this lament cried by Jesus as he hung outside the city gates. Several of the horrific images in the psalm's verses that are sung on Palm Sunday mirror the sufferings endured by Jesus, but the psalm concludes with hope and trust in God's providence.

Focusing the Second Reading

Phil 2:6-11

In his letter to the Christian community at Philippi (in northeastern Greece), Paul quotes what many scholars believe was the text of an early Christian hymn in praise of Jesus' "attitude" of humility and obedience. As Christ totally and unselfishly "emptied himself" to accept crucifixion for our sakes, to follow Jesus requires us to "empty" ourselves of our wants and needs for the sake of others

PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS

How is Christ's "attitude," as articulated in St. Paul's hymn in today's reading from Philippians, the antithesis of the world's "attitude"?

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Has a cross you have had to take up been the means of new life and resurrection?

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When have you felt abandoned by God, but discovered him again in your life?

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Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, March 25, 2018

Gospel (cont.) at the procession with palms

Some of the bystanders said to them,
 "What are you doing, untying the colt?"
 They answered them just as Jesus had told them to,
 and they permitted them to do it.
 So they brought the colt to Jesus
 and put their cloaks over it.
 And he sat on it.
 Many people spread their cloaks on the road,
 and others spread leafy branches
 that they had cut from the fields.
 Those preceding him as well as those following kept crying out:
 "Hosanna!
 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
 Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is to come!
 Hosanna in the highest!"