

**PALMARUM / PALM SUNDAY**

Text: The Passion According to St. Matthew

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

*“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

There is a reason that this day, which the Church has come to know as Palmarum or Palm Sunday, we do not simply hear about JESUS’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but also about the entire Passion Story—JESUS’ institution of His Holy Supper, His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, His betrayal and arrest, His trials before the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate, which made a mockery of justice, the desertion by His most trusted friends, His beatings and humiliation at the hands of evil men, being forsaken by His FATHER, His suffering and death by crucifixion and His burial. It is done for the same reason that the death of JESUS on the Cross must be preached even on the day we celebrate His nativity. It is done because it is all too easy for us to separate this triumphal procession from the true triumph of CHRIST; to forget that this parade led JESUS not to a palace, but to a bloody death upon a cross.

This parade must not be separated from the ghastly procession along the Via Dolorosa, the Way of the Cross. For this was not so much a triumphal victory march as it was a steady funeral procession to the place of JESUS’ execution and death. As He travels to His coronation ceremony, JESUS, the King of kings, whose only crown is that of cruel thorns, must go by the way of death on the Cross.

Even so, JESUS rides. Despite what He knew about the rejection He would soon face, despite the evil plotting of the Sanhedrin and the Pharisees, despite being deserted by those He loved, despite the fact that yet while we were still sinners, CHRIST would die for us, or perhaps even more, for all those reasons, JESUS rides with His eyes resolutely fixed on His Passion.

JESUS rides on to die, to lay down His life for the life of the world. JESUS will lay His life down for you, and take it up again for you. This He does for all your sins and for every sin that has ever been or ever will be committed for all time; for the eating of the forbidden fruit, for the murder of Able, for Sodom and Gomorrah, for David and Bathsheba, for the holocaust and all wars, for war and terrorism, for abortion, neglect, hatred, racism, murder, pride and greed; for your sin, for my sin, for all sin. JESUS rides.

JESUS rides into Jerusalem today, an exalted hero. But in just five short days, JESUS will walk outside the gates of this most holy city, a despised and condemned man. Today, JESUS rides knowing that there is no other way to save you.

JESUS rode to the sound of children's voices and multitudes crying out "*Hosanna to the SON of David!*" Did He hear your voice? Friday, JESUS will hear these same multitudes scream for His Blood as they cry out, "*Crucify Him, crucify Him!*" Will He hear your voice?

Today, we have come near to the end of Lent and arrive at the week of CHRIST's Passion. But "*Passion*" in this sense does not mean in any way the saccharine sweet emotions we might feel as we re-experience the events of Holy Week. Nor does it have anything to do with the sexual abandon of Hollywood movies and romance novels. This "*Passion*" means the suffering and death of JESUS.

Yet, even that definition falls short and does not encompass the entire meaning as it is applied to CHRIST, because it leaves out the single-minded obsession, the driven love of our SAVIOR. When the Church and we Christians use the word, "*Passion*," we are referring to JESUS' suffering and death which was driven by a love so intense that it would not let go of us, by a love so fervent that JESUS gave up everything, even His own life, to save us and make of us the children of God.

This is the reason JESUS rides and this is the reason JESUS died. He was driven by a love so deep that He died for us even when we did not love Him in return. JESUS' love made no demands; it was entirely selfless. That, dearly beloved, is "*The Passion of the CHRIST*".

So, JESUS rides. He rides as the King of kings to submit to His own Law. The penalty for sin is death. This penalty of death must be paid by spotless, blameless, innocent, blood poured out in sacrifice. Someone must die. That is what the Law demands. The Law cannot be fulfilled by your blood. For your blood was conceived in sin and revels in rebellion.

So, JESUS rides to die for those who mock and hate Him, for those who use His Name as a curse, for those who drink too much, who gamble away their lives, commit adultery, gossip, murder, abort their unborn children, and are addicted to pornography. JESUS rides for every kind of sin imaginable. JESUS rides to die for us!

JESUS rides to His glory, but His glory is the Cross. For the Cross is where His love is seen by men; the Cross is where JESUS is lifted up to draw all mankind unto Himself. His Cross is your glory, too. For you were born there out of His side. From

your mother's womb you came forth in water and blood. From the side of CHRIST flows the birthing waters of Holy Baptism in which you have been drowned and from which you have been raised, a new life in CHRIST JESUS. From the side of CHRIST flows the Blood in which you have been bathed and in which your filthy garments have been washed.

JESUS rides down through the ages into our midst today. For lo, He is with you always. He rides into our nave, not as some spirit or ghost, not as some vague recollection or re-enactment, not by some power of the imagination or through Hollywood special effects, not like some ethereal puff of smoke. JESUS rides among us in His Body—the same Body bruised and beaten, bloodied and pierced, laid dead in the tomb and raised up to life again.

That same Body, that actual, real, very physical Body is placed upon the Paten and then upon your tongue so that you may confess JESUS is LORD, that you would eat what is good, what He wants you to have, what makes you whole, that which forgives your sin and gives you peace—His Body. Fed on this Bread, which JESUS has joined Himself to, you are also joined to His Holy death and so to His Cross. And one day soon we shall all be joined to Him in the resurrection.

JESUS rides that Passover week to make a sacrifice, to mark us with Blood that will warn off the angel of death. The Blood CHRIST shed, the Blood that dripped in Gethsemane, that stained the centurion's spear, the Blood that His broken heart ceased to pump; that Blood marks the doorposts of your soul—your lips and tongue—as it pours forth from the Chalice and into your heart.

JESUS rides to do for us what we could not do for ourselves—to make us righteous and holy, acceptable to God. He makes us pure. His Blood is poured into you not so that you may consume it, but so that it would consume and cover you. Death then, passes over you. You are spared and live.

So, this morning we embark upon our holiest week, our most solemn celebration. We commemorate the institution of the New Testament in JESUS' Blood, the destruction of Hell and all its power over us in His holy death, and the vindication of His Kingship on the Day of His resurrection. *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation.”*

JESUS rides. He comes to bear the curse for His people, to save us from our enemies by sacrificing His own life. The sinless One takes the place of the sinner so that the sinner can be freed and bear the name “Barabbas,” which means “*son of the Father.*”

JESUS rides so that He can declare His most heartfelt and passionate desire to you, in which you hear Him say, *“I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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