

Lenten Reflection

Palm Sunday, March 20, 2016

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Today, we rejoice in the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy (9:9-10) made 500 years before the life and public witness of Jesus. It is a prophecy of hope and a promise that war and oppression would end, that peace would come, not just to the people of the covenant, but to all nations, to the ends of the earth!

Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey — riding on a donkey's colt. I will remove the battle chariots from Israel and the warhorses from Jerusalem. I will destroy all the weapons used in battle and your king will bring peace to the nations. His realm will stretch from sea to sea and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.

Today, we celebrate Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. On the surface, Jesus came to join so many other pilgrims who wanted to be together and remember God's protection and care of them through their celebration of the Passover. Riding on a donkey was a symbol of peace and of the rider's intentions to bring peace, to be peace. In ancient Egypt, the palm branch was a symbol of eternal life carried in funeral processions. It became a symbol of the Christian martyrs who had been victorious over death.

I'm struck by the fact that though we carry blessed palm branches and join in procession to the Church, this most sacred event is given little real attention. In our liturgy, we are not allowed to rest in the moment. Luke's Gospel, telling of Jesus' entry into the City of David, is proclaimed prior to our Sunday procession. The regularly-placed readings of the day, from Isaiah, Philippians, and Luke, have already moved us on. The Church jumps forward to Thursday and Friday, at the end of the week, to Jesus' last meal, his betrayal, condemnation, and crucifixion.

What, then, are we called to today? Let's look at Jesus and consider his thoughts and feelings. How complex they must have been! Certainly, Jesus knew of the efforts of the leaders of his church against him and his message. As he processed into the city, he may have felt deep joy and peace at the crowd's welcome and recognition; he may have felt profound hope that the people really understood his message of love and forgiveness, of justice, compassion, and peace. Imagine too Jesus' courage and fear as he rode that donkey, surrounded by his faithful followers. His journey had led him to Jerusalem and he knew it was the end. He may have felt that so much of what he tried to do was unfinished and wondered if it was enough. Yet, he also knew all he had tried to do!

Let's dwell today on what we can learn from Jesus as he enters Jerusalem. Let us humbly ask how we can be his authentic witnesses; how we can keep our eyes fixed on him and gain the grace of courage to face the challenge, the misunderstanding, or the judgment of others, how we can find the peace within ourselves at times of personal loss and the strength of love and forgiveness in the midst of interpersonal struggles; how we can hope for clarity in the choices we must make for our lives today and into the future?

Let us celebrate with Jesus and the crowds today praising God and shouting with joy for the mighty deeds we have seen. Let us sing together: *Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.*