

Today is the first Sunday of Lent. We call the sixth Sunday, Palm Sunday. We bless branches of palm and palm crosses. We process from the garden to the front doors of the Church. It is our reenactment of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem of Jesus of Nazareth. It is a religious action to enrich **us**, the participants, not the onlooker. We capture something of the final entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. "Lift up your heads O you gates and be lifted up you everlasting doors: and the King of glory shall come in." "Who is the King of glory?"

During this Lent we will think about Jesus the King in different scenes of what we call Holy Week. These are incidents which also help us think about our life as Christians, subjects and followers of Christ, who in that week in particular, walk the *Via Dolorosa*: The Way of the Cross.

Today, with Palm Sunday in mind, we think of the King's love.

When Jesus was baptized a voice came from heaven which said, "You are my beloved Son." Jesus heard the voice from the one who could be called 'the lover.' The one who loved a chosen people. The lover who wanted a relationship with his people even though the people did not respond.

While the love of God is still for his people it was at that moment centred in this one man, Jesus of Nazareth. In time "the beloved Son" responded in love for God in practical ways. His actions and words spoke of the love he learnt from the heavenly Father. He loved his friends, the tax collectors and sinners. He loved his enemies. That is not to say he liked them, but in the confrontation, the warnings, in the truth of his answers, and in the prayers of forgiveness he expressed love.

This was not for people to think, "What a nice fellow." It was because he was loved by God and in turn served God. Today's gospel teaches us, Jesus has the opportunity to receive the glory of the world's kingdoms if he will worship the devil. Jesus responded, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve."

For Jesus this was the purpose of his life; to serve God. It was not only by attending the Temple liturgy or going to the Synagogue, although for Jesus they were an essential part of his worship, as they should be for us. To give God his worth meant obedient service to the will and purpose of God.

Like the devil, some of the enemies of Jesus were not God's friends, even though they thought so. They accused Jesus of saying he was a king. The kingship they declared was not the kingship he owned. He was not interested in an earthly kingdom. He loved God and people and he could be declared, The King of Love.

There is no reason to think Jesus stage managed his entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. The gospel writers all have some differences and emphases to suit other purposes. The evangelists used quotations from the Old Testament to speak of the Messiah, the Christ,

"the coming kingdom of our ancestor David." (Mk. 11:10). The quotations were used because the evangelists know Jesus was the true King.

For Jesus we may think of the words of William Barclay, a popular scholar of the last century. "We should be bound to say that this entry of Jesus into Jerusalem was an act of supreme courage. There is a courage which is born of the impulse of the moment, a courage born at some sudden emergency in which a man has no time to think, and in which he becomes a hero by a kind of instinctive reaction. (compare Ahmed Al Ahmed at Bondi last December). But there is an even higher courage, the courage of the man who has had long to think, the courage of the man who sees with complete clarity the terrible things which lie ahead, and who deliberately, of set purpose and having counted the cost, goes on. (Think of Alexei Navalny in Russia). That is the highest of all kinds of courage, and that was the courage of Jesus when he entered Jerusalem." (Crucified & Crowned p.11)

So, we might say, Jesus came with courage. He came with a purpose. He had thought about what God intended for him in his life. He had spent hours in lonely places in prayer. He was confronted and had seen with clarity what he had to do.

He was to be obedient to the point of death on a cross. It was not only obedience as a slave might obey a tyrant but obedience in love for the one who loved him. It was a death and a love that has continuing action for us. The great truth found in Scripture is that while we were yet sinners, even before we were born, Christ died for us. (Ro. 5:8) He gave his life in love for the world.

We are part of the world today. A world that is a wilderness. Men and women seeking sovereignty. The devil still uses the means he used to tempt Jesus; feed them, fascinate them, force them. Temptations to do things that seem good but are of selfish value. Yet we are also people who follow a king of love.

The King's love is demanding, compelling, and yet tender. The passing world's glory like the money, the status symbols, the career path, may dazzle us. We need to remember that at Baptism we declared loyalty and were signed with his cross. When we love we too will walk the way of a cross,. Yet we know we walk a road the King of love walked. So as his subjects, as his followers, we need to respond to the King's love with all our mind, strength and will. (Cf When I survey wondrous cross v4)

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1st in series of the King in Holy Week - The King's Love The Reverend A R Wood