

Readings

Mk 11:1-10 *or* Jn 12:12-16

Is 50:4-7

Ps 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24.

Phil 2:6-11

Mk 14:1—15:47

Joseph L. Narog, O.S.A.
Director of Vocations and Initial Formation
Province of St. Thomas of Villanova

Contrasts

One of the things, I believe, that's most striking about the Palm Sunday readings is that they capture so vividly the real contrasts we experience in Holy Week. Actually, don't they seem to capture the real contrasts we experience throughout our lives? Think about it: rejoicing and grieving; celebration and sorrow; conviction and fickleness. From "Hosanna!" to "Crucify him!," the readings speak of our human condition, of the humanity which Jesus came to share – and redeem. "Obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross," as St. Paul proclaims, Jesus the Christ, being fully human, didn't short circuit the process through his divinity. And, imagine, he did it all for us, for our sakes!

Jesus is with us for the long haul. A question for us to ponder this Holy Week is, do we stick with him? One of the lessons of Palm Sunday is that our faith, our life can't be based simply on the enthusiasm of the moment. It must go much deeper than that. We ace a course. Our team wins the big game. We get a promotion at work. That special someone declares that he or she loves us. We're on top of the world. The true test of faith, of our commitment, though, comes in the difficult times. We too face situations where we might find ourselves questioning, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" We fall short in a course or don't land the job

we wanted. We confront the illness of a parent. We discover the betrayal of a friend or significant other.

But, ultimately, Jesus shows us the way of trust, of remaining grounded in the One who will never abandon us. As he humbly rode that colt into Jerusalem, Jesus knew that many of those who cheered him as a king would soon join the chant, “Crucify him!” Why even one of his most beloved disciples repeatedly would deny him. A line that stands out in Mark’s account of the Passion is haunting: “And they all left him and fled.” How much did that add to Jesus’ pain and suffering? Yet, he remained resolute; as we hear the Suffering Servant declare, in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, “The Lord God is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.”

Do we place our hope, our trust in the approval of a fickle, ever-changing world, where one day’s hero is tomorrow’s pariah? Or are we faithful to the One who loves us with such abandon, who will “greatly exalt” us, if we but follow Christ? As his disciples, baptized in his name, are we ready to recommit to taking Christ’s lead? Jesus the Christ understands; he knows what it is to be human. You might remember that the Gospel a few Sundays ago noted that Jesus “did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well.” That’s why he lovingly, mercifully sticks with us for the long haul. That’s what helps us make our way through the contrasts, the ups and downs of life, highlighted so starkly on this Palm Sunday. It really can feel like a roller coaster sometimes, can’t it? But Jesus proves that the ride is infinitely worthwhile!

The whole of Lent has been leading us here, and now we’ve arrived. So, let’s use this holiest of weeks to stick close to Jesus, renewing our faith, our conviction that because he took

on our humanity, we can live life to its fullest, working to be the persons we truly were created to be; and, in the end, sharing in Christ's divinity, everlasting life without contrasts, no more grieving, sorrow, or fickleness, only pure joy. To paraphrase our own St. Augustine, "We shall then see with an inexpressibly different feeling of love. We then will shout, 'Why, it's true!' And, because we shall see the truth with perpetual delight, we will be moved to praise God always" (*Sermon 362, 29*).

"Hosanna in the highest!" "Jesus Christ is Lord." Only one man could turn a week of betrayal, intrigue, and murder into the most holy week of the year...