

Readings

Lk 19:28-40
Is 50:4-7
Ps 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24
Phil 2:6-11
Lk 22:14-23:56

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The Liturgy of Palm Sunday mirrors in a uniquely appropriate way the very itinerary of Christ's life, marked as it was by both triumph and tragedy, glory and reproach. Not once, but repeatedly, he had been hailed by crowds as Messiah and Lord, king and Savior, but no less so as a criminal and blasphemer as well. Palm Sunday brings this intense disparity into sharp focus as we recall in the span of a few minutes the jubilation of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and the devastation of his passion and death. The drama with which the Liturgy recounts the contrast cannot help but stir us, but awareness of the familiar path it depicts should not completely surprise us either. For this is our itinerary as well, the one we travel continually in life.

We began the Lenten Season signed with the mark of frailty and mortality, the ash of blackened, spent palm branches, and were encouraged then to undertake the journey to renewal and rebirth. Ironically, that journey had us pass through loss and surrender, through restraint and renunciation. We were like seed buried in the ground awaiting spring's welcome call. Today, the sound of Hosannas and the sight of fresh, new palm might distract us for a moment, tempting us to think that the journey has reached its conclusion, that this is what we had been preparing for.

As I say this, I wonder if Jesus was distracted similarly. When St. Luke tells us not too far into the Gospel that the Master was resolutely determined to go up to Jerusalem, was it for this, for the praises and enthusiasm of the crowds? Was he thinking at this moment once again of the tempter's second great desert offer: power and the glory of many kingdoms?

But Jesus presses on, knowing that more challenging steps are still ahead. And with him we move forward also, wary, hopefully, of the noises and voices that surround us, some to applaud our efforts and others to dissuade our endurance. With him we must be intent on hearing the Word within us that will speak at precisely the right moment: "It is finished."