

PALM SUNDAY

March 29, 2015

"... Hosanna, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus... (who) emptied himself taking the form of a slave... and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.""

✠ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

There's an old saying that goes - "One day you're cock of the walk, the next you're a feather duster". In some ways the triumphal entry of Jesus on Palm Sunday and the journey to Calvary is an apt illustration of that very human reflection on the condition of life and the reality of popular and political support and how easy it is to fall from any pedestal.

The fervent support of any crowd may always be shallow. Jesus seeks and models our humility before the Father... and calls us also to take up our cross and to follow him even if that following makes us a laughing stock or a feather duster!

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem while doubtless in popular estimation the major theme of this Sunday, is both historically and liturgically merely a subsidiary theme, serving only as a prelude to the Passion. That is why since the Second Vatican Council the Church commonly names this Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord - as of course the long reading of the Passion narrative for the Holy Gospel very much dominates the Liturgy of the Day and begins the church's Holy Week reflection as we journey with Christ to the Cross in the sheer hope of the Resurrection.

But the entry into Jerusalem (even if it weren't his first trip there) was on this occasion his ultimate challenge to the religious authorities of the day. And it was obviously deliberate - God's final judgment was breaking through and Israel must decide.

As he approaches the city, he expresses this challenge by riding on a colt (a horse or an ass? Linguistically a "horse" is a possibility and more expressive of the challenge... but asses were, and still are more common in Palestine)

Two features suggest that the entry may have taken place at the Feast of Tabernacles rather than at Passover - the palms and the singing of Psalm 118:25 - Blessed is he who comes - but that of course could be a general welcome to Pilgrims rather than a Messianic leader.

The theologian Bornkamm, suggests that Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem was messianically "over-exposed"

Jesus work and ministry undoubtedly created both messianic hopes and fears - but it is hardly likely that he was overtly trying to do this....however the church in a real sense has interpreted this story in the light of the Easter Faith.

The miraculous discovery of the ass suggests to the earliest Palestinian community the supernatural foresight of the prophet-man of God and in the Hellenistic church that of the "divine man".

Furthermore the term "our Father, David" would have been unusual in Judaism and it would seem to be a liturgical acclamation of the early Christian community.

So at the level of tradition, the entry into Jerusalem is an overt expression of Jesus' Messiahship understood in terms of

the Davidic Messiah, the eschatological prophet, the Kyrios (Lord) and the divine man.

Interestingly, both Mark and John in their Gospel accounts place the Triumphal Entry immediately before the Passion narrative and so emphasize what the Liturgy emphasizes, namely, that the entry is NOT an isolated episode, but introductory to and subordinate to the Passion.

And this week, with the church throughout the world, we re-enter this great and holy mystery.

With the crowds in Jerusalem we too go out to meet him, we too have heard of his works and have seen his power in the faithfulness of people that even we ourselves know!

We too must choose - no matter how inconvenient that choice might be... but we must choose and we cannot indefinitely say, not just yet Lord, for now is the appointed time, NOW is the day of salvation...

AMEN