

Homily for Palm Sunday - 2023

Many years ago now, my grandmother would use an Irish saying when someone had what might be called a 'hang-dog' expression on their face or when someone sulked and dropped their lower lip, grandma would ask... *"And what's wrong with you, pray tell? You've got a face on you as long as a Palm Sunday Gospel?"*

Back in those days, the Passion Gospel that was read in the Roman Church on Palm Sunday was indeed a very long one. It began at Matthew 26: v 36 and concluded at Matthew 27: v 54....93 verses! The Book of Common Prayer, by comparsion, has a Palm Sunday Gospel, its the very one we have heard today ..Matthew 27; v1 - 54...and its 54 verses.

Strangely, the Modern Roman Lectionary provides an even longer Passion reading for today... Matthew ch26; 14 - ch 27: v 66 a whopping 127 verses! As well, the rubrics for Palm Sunday in the Revised Roman Missal indicate that a homily need not be preached.

We might guess that the reason for this exception is the sheer length of the Gospel texts.

Not only is the Gospel of the Passion itself extremely long, there are in reality two Gospel Readings proclaimed on Palm Sunday: the first we heard outside the door of the

church, Matthew Ch 21: vs 1-11 which recounted our Lord's entrance into Jerusalem.

Its certainly tempting for me to say right now that there will be no homily given this morning, for what can I possibly say that would add anything to the Passion Reading we have just heard, so let's get on with the Mass. Some of you would be relieved. Others may feel cheated and I suspect Fr Rene would say to me afterwards..."Don't spring something unannounced like that on us again, please James!"

Accordingly, here is just one devotional thought, that may help you make the passion of Jesus Christ more present and more real to you today and all through Holy Week.

As they waved their branches and strewed their cloaks, the crowds cried out ... *"Hosanna. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest."*

We repeat the cry of that crowd at every celebration of Holy Mass when we say or sing... *"Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord. Glory be to Thee O Lord Most High."*

And then immediately the great Eucharistic Prayer, the Prayer of Consecration as we usually call it, begins.

Who is it who is coming at Holy Mass?

It is none other than He who in great humility rode on the Donkey.

It is none other than He who prayed with such fervour and anguish of heart in the Garden of Gethsemane that the sweat fell like drops of blood from his forehead.

It is none other than He who was betrayed by the kiss of a friend and for only 30 pieces of silver.

It is none other than He who was mocked and ridiculed by the soldiers, spat upon and crowned with thorns.

It is none other than He who was stripped stark naked and crucified between two common criminals.

It is none other than He who in his last agony cried out in utter dereliction, "My God. My God. Why hast Thou forsaken me?"

Yes, dear people, every Sunday, every day, at every Mass, the Man of Sorrows comes to us in great humility beneath the appearance of bread and wine. He shows forth the trophies of His passion and death and with them He pleads for us to the God Father.

This is the great Mystery of Faith, that Jesus Christ should undergo any of this for you, for me, for the whole human race. Today, and at every Mass you attend this week, at the elevation of the Sacred Host, and again at the elevation of the Saving Chalice, and when you come to Holy Communion, remember for yourself, for your loved ones, for the church, for all who seek our prayers and for the whole human race... the well known prayer of the Passion:

“O Saviour Christ, who by Thy Cross and Passion hath redeemed us, save us and help us we humbly beseech Thee. Amen”