

Palm Sunday

Mark 11:1-10

Isa 50:4-7

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

Phil 2:6-11

Mark 14:1 – 15:47

On this day the Church recalls the entrance of Christ the Lord into Jerusalem to accomplish his Passion and Resurrection. Our liturgy today marks the beginning of what Christians in the Middle Ages referred to as “The Great Week”. Our spiritual training during these past few weeks of Lent now reach their fulfilment, and we prepare to encounter the deepest mysteries of our faith.

You know, ever since my return to the faith several years ago I’ve always maintained that Holy Week really is the best time to be Catholic – the rhythm of this week has a structural genius to it that more recent expressions of Christianity really don’t have an equivalent of. Now don’t get me wrong, this week is intense—it’s hard work—but don’t forget that this work on our part is but a small offering of thanks compared with the incomparable gift of our salvation that Christ won for us.

We speak of this week as “Holy”, and it’s worth reminding ourselves what this adjective means lest its familiarity lead us to miss its true meaning. “Holy” means *other, set apart, belonging to God* – and for that reason *different*. This week is called holy because God is uniquely present and active in it: in it are celebrated—in it are still powerful—the events through which Our Lord has redeemed us.

The events we will relive this week are extraordinary – and it is in their uniqueness—their *holiness*—that their significance lies. The centre of this uniqueness is of course the person of Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen King, who is today given a king’s welcome into the Holy City.

It is Christ who makes what we do during this hour different from what we do all the other hours of the week. It is Christ who makes the community we constitute here different from all our other associations. It is Christ who inspires and empowers the difference we represent, the difference we are called to make in the world.

This is where the Christian difference lies. No other communities except the Christian churches gather because of, in, and for the sake of Jesus Christ. And, in the end, it would be self-defeating for us to gather for any other reason. Our centre does not lie first of all in our views of society or any particular views of individual or collective morality. If we Christians are supposed to be different in many of these particular areas—as indeed we should be—those differences must in some way be implications of what we celebrate this week, this *Holy Week*. This week we revisit the very foundation of why we are Christian at all.

Because the story around which it revolves is holy, this week deserves to be kept holy: to be kept differently, to be *lived* differently. It is a week in which to try to re-centre ourselves around Jesus Christ in acknowledgment of the sin from which he came to free us, in gratitude for the forgiveness his dying words assure us, and in renewed commitment to the new and different life his Resurrection both displays and enables.

So I strongly encourage you to enter into this week as fully as you can. Make the effort to attend the entire Triduum if at all possible – Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil. For these three days are really one great liturgy, and together they possess an immense power.

If we approach it generously, the liturgy of this week has a way of speaking to our souls that is far more eloquent than any homily. I mean, there's certainly a place for in-depth analysis of these events, but it's far more beneficial for us if we put that aside this week, and instead allow ourselves to adopt a more receptive stance. Recall the instruction that Jesus gave to Peter, James and John in the garden of Gethsemane – *watch and pray*.

Watch and pray. Unplug as much as you can, and allow yourself to just be present. Let the mysteries we commemorate seep into your soul, and let the magnitude of it all affect you deeply.

As I say, there's a structural genius to this week, in that if you allow yourself to really go to Calvary with Our Lord, the liturgy will serve to raise you up with him, so that by Easter Sunday you can't help but be overflowing with the most profound joy. And it will be the kind of joy that is not dependant on pleasant circumstances – indeed, it will have been wrought from the most unpleasant of circumstances.

So be generous, put in the effort, knowing that our Lord is never outdone in generosity. And let's pray for each other this week, remembering in a special way those who will be entering the Church this Easter. Holy Week really does remind us Catholics that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. This is our most special time, when we are reconnected to the greatest mysteries of our faith, and when we relive the greatest event in the history of the world.