Palm Sunday March 28, 2021

The name of this weekend’s celebration is “Palm Sunday of the Lord’s Passion.” Just this title should give us a clue that something unusual is happening. Our celebration started differently today with a gospel reading at the back of the church followed by our procession into church to reenact Jesus’ jubilant procession into Jerusalem.

By the time of the regular gospel reading, jubilation disappeared as we recalled Jesus’ suffering and death.

What happed between these two gospel readings? Did the crowd do a complete turnaround?

I don’t think so. I think there was one kind of people outside of the city of Jerusalem and another kind inside.

The processional gospel began with the words, “When Jesus and his disciples drew near to Jerusalem….” So, it seems that all this jubilation occurred outside of the city. These outsiders were excited about Jesus as the long-expected savior riding into the City of David on a colt as predicted by the prophet Zechariah.

Jesus seems to know what he is doing and what lies ahead by the way he controls the situation by telling his disciples that he needs a colt. Jesus is going to Jerusalem and knows what is going to happen there, the same thing that had happened to prophets before him.

People spread cloaks and branches on the road as had been for kings before Jesus. The people were anticipating the arrival of David’s Kingdom; they see Jesus as linked to the glorious moment when the David-like messiah would come.

This all ends during the passion narrative when the crowds shouted to Pilate for Jesus’ death: “Crucify him!” These were a different kind of people, for this gospel reading begins with, “the chief priests and the scribes were seeking a way to arrest him by treachery and put him to death.” The crowd inside Jerusalem certainly isn’t the same crowd that was outside.

It seems to be the outsiders who are the ones excited about Jesus. Think of their life-long desperation. They are the gospel “highway and by-way” people, those who never get special places at the table, invitations to upper-crust banquets, or places of honor in the temple and synagogue. They have already experienced or heard about how welcome their lot is with Jesus. Finally, there is someone from God to tell them they are not forgotten; indeed, God loves them. Jesus, the one with authority, has recognized them, healed their afflictions, and forgiven their sins. They know too that Jesus is a Galilean, an outsider, one of their own, raised up by God.

Are we part of the outsiders who are seeking Jesus or are we with the insiders still trying to control him?

Although the gospel passion has an evil crowd, we must read the passion story to find out that God sent his only Son to die for everyone’s sins; yes, and even for the sins of the crowd that put him to death. And we will be assured of this when we come back for Easter Vigil Mass next weekend to celebrate Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, something that no one else ever did.

That is what makes The Easter Vigil Mass so incredible. The night-vigil signifies Christ’s passage from the dead to the living by the liturgy that begins in darkness, representing Sin and Death, and is enlightened by the fire and the Easter candle, the light of Christ. The church, the mystical Body of Christ and the community of believers, is lead from spiritual darkness to the light of his truth.

We rejoice in Christ’s bodily resurrection, from the darkness of the tomb: we pray for our passage from death into eternal life, from sin into grace, from the weariness and infirmity of old age to the freshness and vigor of youth, from the anguish of the cross to peace and unity with God, and from this sinful world unto the Father in heaven.

We are now beginning Holy Week, a time for deep and sincere reflection on who we are, on our current relationship with Christ, and a time to embrace Christ’s passion. Everything we are as Catholics rest upon this week. The week that includes Christ’s Passion, His Death, and ultimately His resurrection. It is a time for us to embrace our own passion, our own sorrows, our own troubles, our own crosses, and to die to the sinfulness of our lives.

The sinfulness that all too often is rooted in Greed, Pride, and Envy.

If not done already this Lent, this is a time for penitential reflection, a time to be freed from the shackles of sin.

It is a time to unite our lives with Christ. It is a time to be resurrected with Christ. To be spiritually resurrected anew, awakened to His joy, His freedom, His power, and His Love.

His life is to become our life…