

2019 PALM SUNDAY

In the first of our Gospel Readings today, we heard the story of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. It coincided with the beginning of a week of festivities in Jerusalem for the Jewish celebration of the Passover on the following Saturday. A crowd of fellow pilgrims had accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover and felt that it was now time to come out into the open and to joyfully proclaim Jesus as the Messiah of the nation. So they gathered at one of the gates of the city and as Jesus entered, sitting on a donkey, they spread palms on the road in front of Him- all the time shouting: "Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessings on Him who comes in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest heaven."

To commemorate this moment, when at least some of the People of Israel acknowledged Jesus as the true descendant of King David- the Messiah, we have processed into the Church today carrying palm branches and singing hymns. The Coming of the Messiah was a day foretold for over a thousand years.

But in shocking contrast, a few minutes later we have heard another Gospel read...telling of another crowd- five days after Palm Sunday- bellowing out: "Crucify Him. Crucify Him."

In our Old Testament Reading the Prophet Isaiah saw in a vision this very thing happening- a Man of Suffering, a Man of immense courage, being cruelly tortured- offering no resistance to His executioners as they scourged His back and tore at his beard. This Man did not cover his face against insult and spittle but set His face like a flint."

We know the man prefigured Christ, our Lord.

St. Luke's account of Our Lord's Passion presents Jesus as a man of compassion and radiant forgiveness: reaching out to the women of Jerusalem and to the dying thief and giving them comfort; and with His last breath- lifting His eyes to the Father and begging the Father to forgive the evil people who had brought Him to the Cross.

Our focus over the coming week will be on Jesus. What happened on the fateful day we call "Good Friday" had cosmic repercussions. He, the Son of God, the Second Person within the Godhead, took upon Himself the guilt of all human sin and offered His cruel death to the Father as an act of supreme love.

Remember that it was not Christ's sufferings which redeemed the world. All of Jesus' dreadful sufferings would not have redeemed even one small

corner of the world if He had not endured them with love. We were redeemed by His radiant love.

It cannot be said too often- it was not Jesus' sufferings that redeemed us. It was His love.

Jesus died because He believed it to be the Will of His Father that He enter Jerusalem and proclaim Himself to be the Messiah. On Palm Sunday He did the Will of the Father- freely and out of love, He entered Jerusalem and proceeded to the Temple and drove out the money-lenders. Staying in Jerusalem and preaching fearlessly to people who hated Him, led directly to His death. He did this out of love for His Father. He believed this to be the Will of His Father.

Let our focus during the coming week not be upon the dreadful sufferings of Jesus. Focus rather upon His love- upon His fulfilling the role on Earth He believed the Father to have given Him as Messiah. Focus, too, as St Luke did, upon His compassion for the suffering of all those around Him and upon His wonderful forgiveness of His executioners.

We were redeemed by Jesus' Love; a Love so magnificent that it embraced the Universe.