

Sunday, March 29, 2015

Palm Sunday

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7

2nd Reading: Philippians 2:6-11

Responsorial: Psalm 22:8-9, 17-20, 23-24

Gospel: Mark 14:1–15:47

Following Jesus' Example of Self-sacrifice and Compassion

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! (Mark 11:9)

When artists talk about contrast, they're referring to the arrangement of opposite elements—light versus dark, small versus large, rough versus smooth. It's a technique they use to add a dramatic effect to their work. If we thought of God as an artist, we would definitely say that Palm Sunday is a study in contrasts. God created the universe out of nothing, fashioned the stars and planets, sustains every living thing, and knows every hair on our heads. Yet this same awesome, all-powerful God chose to enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey. You can't have a more dramatic contrast than that. Or can you?

That Jesus, our King, came to his people riding a lowly pack animal is a huge contrast. But even more dramatic is the fact that he was crowned with thorns and not with gold, and beaten rather than worshipped. Or that he, who would judge heaven and earth, was judged and condemned by the very people he created.

Jesus went through all the pain and humiliation of the cross so that we could be reconciled with God. He who is Life itself embraced death so that we could receive eternal life.

Keep this in mind during Mass today. During the Holy, Holy, remember the citizens of Jerusalem who spread out their cloaks and waved palm branches at Jesus. Like you, they called out, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." But just a few days later, they joined the Sanhedrin in calling out, "Crucify him!" (Mark 15:14). And through it all, through all the contrasts and ups and downs that he faced, Jesus continued to love. He continued to forgive. He never forgot his mission to save us all.

So when you say these words, do it with all the conviction you can muster. Praise the Lord for coming so humbly. And ask him to help you with the contrasts in your life!

"Lord, thank you for coming to us so humbly! Teach me to follow your example of self-sacrifice and compassion."

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

1. Passion or Palm Sunday begins Holy Week, when we are all called to relive and to celebrate the events, which went before and surrounded Christ's death and resurrection, the inexhaustible source of our salvation. We begin by recalling Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. He is a sign of contradiction, acclaimed by some and reviled by others. In what ways can Jesus be a sign of contradiction in your own lives: acclaimed at times, ignored at other times, and even doubted during times of suffering?
2. In the first reading and the responsorial Psalm, we begin to get a vivid glimpse of what Jesus suffered for us. Don't let the words slip by because they are so familiar to you. Try to visualize what it must have been like for the Son of God to have been beaten, scoffed at, mocked, and pierced for YOU. What are some steps you can take to enter more deeply into the Church's Holy Week events? In what ways can you "keep watch" with Jesus through his Holy Week of suffering and death on the cross?
3. In the second reading we learn that Christ "emptied" himself and humbled himself when he became man. St. Augustine called humility the "royal road". It is the road Christ took when he became man and it is the only way we can get back to God. How about you? How do you react when you have been humbled or criticized or even rejected? Does your sense of self and pride in your own worth and talents ever interfere in your relations with others? In what ways?
4. It is said that St. Mark wrote his Gospel for the Gentile's whom he desired to bring to believe in Jesus' divinity. The gentile Roman centurion at the cross professes: "Truly this man was the Son of God." In what ways do you see Jesus' divinity in his passion, death, and resurrection?
5. The meditation describes the many "contrasts" we see in the Gospel's description of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and his passion and death on the Cross. How would you describe these contrasts? How would you describe the contrasts in your life? Which ones need more of the Lord's grace to overcome them?
6. Take some time now to pray and ask Jesus for the grace to overcome the "contrasts" in your life so you can follow, in a deeper way, his example of self-sacrifice and compassion. Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as the starting point.

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, a director of partner relations for **The Word Among Us Partners**, (<http://www.waupartners.org/>); a ministry of **The Word Among Us** (www.wau.org) to the military, prisoners, women with crisis pregnancies or who have had abortions, and college students. He is also a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Maurice was also the founding Executive Director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men**, for which he is currently a Trustee (<http://www.nfcmusa.org/>). He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]