

'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'

4th April 2020 (Palm Sunday, Year A)

(Matthew 21:1-11);

Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm Psalm 21(22):8-9,17-20,23-24; Philippians 2:6-11; Matthew 26:14-27:66.

Today we enter the holiest week in our liturgical year. We start with celebrating Jesus' solemn entry into Jerusalem, marking the last week of his earthly life. The Son of David, the one who sits on the David's royal throne, enters solemnly into his city. This is highly symbolical imagery. When a king conquers a country, or when he becomes king, he enters the capital city and is given the keys to its doors, a sign that he is now the ruler of the city and the whole kingdom. Kings usually ride on stallions, an image of power and might.

In the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, this royal imagery is subverted. Instead of a stallion, this king rides a humble donkey, an animal of labour. He comes into his city and is crowned, not with a golden jewelled crown, but with thorns. He is dressed in the red cloak of royalty and led to his throne, the cross. The king is then raised up high for all to look up to. The cross is his throne and when he is lifted up, he will draw all nations to himself (Jn 12:32). The title on top of the cross is written in three languages, Hebrew, Greek and Latin; Greek and Latin being the languages of culture and politics of the day. The title was therefore addressed to the whole world!

In his letter to the Philippians, St Paul tells us that Jesus comes to his throne, not with the power of a strong army, but in great humility. He is God himself, creator of the universe. He is the Word through whom everything is created. Yet he chooses to set aside his divinity and come down among us as a human person. Paul points out that Jesus did not come as any regular human person, but as a servant (slave), the lowest stratum of society. Jesus is a king who does not rule by giving orders to those who follow him, but who leads by example.

Jesus' weapon of choice is his humility. Born in a stable in Bethlehem and laid in a manger, he grows up hidden from everyone's eyes. Then he comes forth to preach and teach, calling to himself not the wealthy and the powerful, but simple fishermen, publicans and sinners. At the Last Supper, John presents us Jesus on his knees, in front of his disciples, washing their dirty feet, a job so lowly that not even servants are expected to carry out! And if this was not enough, 'he became humbler still,' dying as a criminal, hanging on a cross!

What is the meaning of all this? What does this story mean? Where does it end? It all depends on the way you choose to look at Jesus. Many, who cannot understand God's hidden language, reject Jesus and his divine story. They deny the existence of God and live their life independently of God. Others choose to believe, and in this humble man from Nazareth, see God made man. Some, inspired by his actions, offer to give up their life for the benefit of their sisters and brothers.

Jesus invites us to follow him and be of service to our sisters and brothers. In this year of COVID-19, when many are asking 'where is God?' we see Jesus-like figures in our midst. People who go out of their way to reach out to those in need, especially the frail and the elderly. Others, nurses and doctors, who minister to their sisters and brothers at the risk of being infected and of dying of the virus they are trying to overcome. The image of washing the disciples' feet is not a romantic one that we usually like to watch being performed on Holy Thursday, but an act of love and self-giving, like Jesus, 'even unto death!'

As we journey this week through the sacred days of Holy Week, as we reflect at home and with our family the great events, let us re-live this week. Let us ask ourselves: how can I be a Jesus-like

figure in my life today? How can I live in humility, giving up my life for my sisters and brothers around me?

May we live a holy and blessed Holy Week!

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