

Cycle B Palm Sunday

At the Procession with Palms – Gospel Mt 21:1-11

When Jesus and the disciples drew near Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find an ass tethered, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them here to me. And if anyone should say anything to you, reply, 'The master has need of them.' Then he will send them at once." This happened so that what had been spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled: Say to daughter Zion, "Behold, your king comes to you, meek and riding on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden." The disciples went and did as Jesus had ordered them. They brought the ass and the colt and laid their cloaks over them, and he sat upon them. The very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and strewed them on the road. The crowds preceding him and those following kept crying out and saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest." And when he entered Jerusalem the whole city was shaken and asked, "Who is this?" And the crowds replied, "This is Jesus the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee."

At the Mass - Reading I Is 50:4-7

The Lord GOD has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them. Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear; and I have not rebelled, have not turned back. I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting. The Lord GOD is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.

Reading II Phil 2:6-11

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Gospel Mt 26:14—27:66

One of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver, and from that time on he looked for an opportunity to hand him over. On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples approached Jesus and said, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The teacher says, "My appointed time draws near; in your house I shall celebrate the Passover with my disciples."'" The disciples then did as Jesus had ordered, and prepared the Passover.

When it was evening, he reclined at table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me." Deeply distressed at this, they began to say to him one after another, "Surely it is not I, Lord?" He said in reply, "He who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will betray me. The Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born." Then Judas, his betrayer, said in reply, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" He answered, "You have said so."

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, from now on I shall not drink this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it with you new in the kingdom

of my Father." Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, "This night all of you will have your faith in me shaken, for it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be dispersed; but after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee." Peter said to him in reply, "Though all may have their faith in you shaken, mine will never be." Jesus said to him, "Amen, I say to you, this very night before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." Peter said to him, "Even though I should have to die with you, I will not deny you." And all the disciples spoke likewise.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane.....

... But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit.

[Here all kneel and pause for a short time.]

And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming forth from their tombs after his resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many. The centurion and the men with him who were keeping watch over Jesus feared greatly when they saw the earthquake and all that was happening, and they said, "Truly, this was the Son of God!" There were many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him. Among them were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was himself a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be handed over. Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in clean linen and laid it in his new tomb that he had hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed. But Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained sitting there, facing the tomb.

The next day, the one following the day of preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember that this impostor while still alive said, 'After three days I will be raised up.' Give orders, then, that the grave be secured until the third day, lest his disciples come and steal him and say to the people, 'He has been raised from the dead.' This last imposture would be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "The guard is yours; go, secure it as best you can." So they went and secured the tomb by fixing a seal to the stone and setting the guard.

Every year this Palm Sunday liturgy should leave us amazed as we pass from the joy of welcoming Jesus as he enters Jerusalem to the sorrow of watching him condemned to death and then crucified. If we let it, that sense of interior amazement will remain with us throughout Holy Week.

From the start, Jesus leaves us amazed. His people give him a boisterous welcome, yet he enters Jerusalem on a lowly colt. His people expect a powerful liberator at Passover, yet he comes to fulfill the Passover by sacrificing himself. His people are hoping to triumph over the Romans by the sword, but Jesus comes to celebrate God's triumph through the cross. What happened to those people who in a few days' time went from shouting "*Hosanna*" to crying out "*Crucify him*"? What happened was that they were following an idea of the Messiah rather than following the Messiah himself. They admired Jesus, but they did not let themselves be amazed by him. Amazement is not the same as admiration. Admiration can be worldly, since it follows our own tastes and expectations. Amazement, on the other hand, opens us to the newness that others bring. Even today, there are many people who admire Jesus because He said beautiful things; He was filled with love and forgiveness; His example changed history, They admire him, but their lives are not changed. To admire Jesus is not enough. We must follow in his footsteps, to let ourselves be challenged by him; to pass from admiration to amazement.

What is most amazing about the Lord and his Passover is the fact that he achieves glory through humiliation. He triumphs by accepting suffering and death, things that we would rather avoid. Jesus – as Saint Paul tells us – "*emptied himself... he humbled himself*" (Phil 2:7.8). This is the amazing thing: to see the Almighty reduced to nothing. To see the Word who knows all things teach us in silence from the height of the cross. To see the king of kings enthroned on a cross. Seeing the God of the universe stripped of everything and crowned with thorns instead of glory. To see the One who is goodness personified, insulted and beaten. Why all this humiliation? Why, Lord, did you endure all this?

Jesus did it for us...to plumb the depths of our human experience, our entire existence, all our sin. To draw near to us and not abandon us in our suffering and our death. To redeem us, to save us. Jesus was lifted high on the cross in order to descend into the abyss of our suffering. He experienced our deepest sorrows, failures, loss of everything, betrayal by a friend, even abandonment by God. By experiencing in the flesh our deepest struggles and conflicts, he redeemed and transformed them. His love draws close to our frailty; it touches the very things of which we are most ashamed. Yet now we know that we are not alone: God is at our side in every affliction, in every fear...no evil, no sin, no stubbornness will ever have the final word. God triumphs, but the palms of victory pass through the wood of the cross. For the palms and the cross are inseparable.

Today's Gospel shows us, immediately after the death of Jesus, a splendid icon of amazement. It is the scene of the centurion who, upon seeing that Jesus had died, said: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mk 15:39). He was amazed by love. He saw Jesus die in love, and this amazed him. Jesus suffered immensely, but He never stopped loving. This is what it is to be amazed before God, who can fill even death with love.

During this Holy Week, let us lift our eyes to the cross, in order to receive the grace of amazement. As Saint Francis of Assisi contemplated the crucified Lord, he was amazed that his friars did not weep. What about us? Can we still be moved by God's love? Have we lost the ability to be amazed by him? Has our faith grown dull from habit. Maybe we remain trapped in our regrets and allow ourselves to be crippled by our disappointments. Maybe we have lost all our trust or even feel worthless. But perhaps, behind all these "maybes", lies the fact that we need to be open to the gift of the Spirit who gives us the grace of amazement.

Brothers and sisters, today God continues to fill our minds and hearts with amazement. Let us be filled with that amazement as we gaze upon the crucified Lord. May we also say: "*You are truly the Son of God. You are my God*".