

## **PALM SUNDAY HOMILY-MARCH 28, 2021**

**READINGS: Isaiah 50: 4-7;**

**Responsorial Psalm-Psalm 22;**

**Philippians 2:6-11;**

**Gospel of Mark 14:1-15: 47)**

### **Following the path of faithful and generous service.**

Today's celebration of Palm Sunday leads us into the Holy Week of Lent. Traditionally, the celebration of Palm Sunday consists of two parts-the celebration of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem with the blessing of palms, and the celebration of the Eucharist during which we read the Passion narrative. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown with its restrictions, this year the celebration of the first part is omitted. Palms that have been blessed earlier will be distributed after Mass. Even though the celebration of the first part of today's liturgy has been omitted, it is still important that we connect this event of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem with that of his Passion. The two events cannot be separated from each other.

On this Palm Sunday, the Church has given us three readings inviting us to reflect on: what sort of a saving king Jesus was to the people who warmly welcomed him into Jerusalem, and to us who believe in him. The first reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah talks about a servant "with a tongue of a teacher". This servant suffered in carrying out his mission. He suffered humiliation, disgrace and pain. Yet, this unnamed servant was sustained by his belief that God would not abandon him. The story of the suffering servant in the first reading leads us to the Gospel reading from Mark-- the Passion narrative of Jesus. The Gospel reading focuses on the events of Jesus that happened in his last days on earth-the betrayal, the condemnation, the pain and the suffering. As Mark stresses the crude trial and shocking details of Jesus' suffering and death, the Evangelist also revealed the identity of Jesus as "God's Son". The expression "Truly, this man was God's Son" was spoken by the centurion after the death of Jesus on the cross. It will be recalled that at the beginning of his Gospel, the Evangelist described Jesus as the "Son of God". Mark used these words spoken by the centurion to confirm the divinity of Jesus to his contemporaries.

The mission of Jesus, the Son of God is what Paul wrote about in the second reading from the Letter to the Philippians. Before today's passage Paul had exhorted the early Christians to develop an attitude like that of Jesus. In today's passage, Paul reminded the early Christians that, "Though Jesus was in the form of God ... he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-death on a cross" (Philippians 2). Paul encouraged the early Christians to be humble.

What do we learn from today's readings? When we do the three readings in the light of each other, we can connect the unnamed servant in the first reading to be Jesus. The celebration of

Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, his Passion and Death are both significant to today's liturgy in the sense that they speak to us about the identity and the mission of Jesus. The two different events-- Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and his Passion-- occurred a separate times, yet their connection helps to reveal the drama that occurred at the end of Jesus' life on earth. Today's celebrations are referred to as paradoxical-- they display contradictions. The triumphant celebration of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem exhibited an atmosphere of victory, joy and hope and it is in contrast to the atmosphere of hostility and hopelessness displayed in the Passion narrative. The people saw Jesus as the one coming to fulfill his appointed role as a champion of the people. They believed Jesus would set them free from oppression. The people who carried palms joyfully welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem as a saving king. However, Jesus was aware of what was ahead of him in Jerusalem-- his Passion and Death. But, the crowd didn't know that. We read that the person who was considered as a king and a savior was also the one who was to suffer humiliation and death.

As we enter Holy Week, how do we apply the readings to our Lenten journey? What is the spiritual significance in our lives of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem and his Passion? The palms remain a great symbol of Palm Sunday celebration. The cross is the most significant symbol of the Christian faith. It is interesting to note that we usually make the palms into the shape of the cross and takes them home. Have we wondered why we make the palms in the form of a cross? Today's celebration calls us to reflect on our deeper understanding of who is Jesus to us. Today we remember that Jesus is a King whose kingship was revealed in his suffering for our sake.

What is the spiritual significance of the two events--the joyful Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and his Passion-- in our own lives? The pandemic has been affecting and continues to affect our way of life. There are many things we cannot do because of the lockdown with its restrictions. We might experience our own pain and sufferings brought on by the pandemic. However, today's celebration offers us hope. The hope is that Jesus didn't die to save us from our suffering, but his suffering and death brought us life. Jesus offered himself for us on the cross because of his great love for us. Today, let us ask God to grant us courage and strength to follow Jesus down the path of faithful and generous service to all God's people.

**Fr. Yaw Acheampong**