



Prayers

Collect of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, You sent Your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience and be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Readings

John 12:12-19 (Palm Sunday Procession),
Psalm 118:19-29 (antiphon v. 26) or Psalm 31:9-16 (antiphon v. 5),
Zechariah 9:9-12,
Philippians 2:5-11,
Mark 14:1-15:47 or Mark 15:1-47 or John 12:20-43

Hymns

Palm Sunday Hymn of the Day – 442
Sunday of the Passion Hymn of the Day – 438 or 440
Other Hymns – 441 (OT), 420 (G1), 423 (G1), 560 (G2), 837 (G2), 437, 443

As people redeemed by the King who entered Jerusalem on a donkey so that He could leave carrying a cross, let us pray for ourselves, for our brothers and sisters in Christ, and for those who cannot pray for themselves.

Heavenly Father, as Your Son humbled Himself for our salvation, give to each of us and to every member of Your Church a confident faith in Christ's Passion for us, so that during this Holy Week and throughout our lives we would humbly entrust ourselves and all those whom You place in our lives to You. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, Your Son promised that when He was lifted up, He would draw all people to Himself. Turn unbelievers from their false gods to You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. Bless the work of missionaries throughout the world. Give to each of us the courage to speak of our King, who comes righteous and having salvation. By the power of Your Gospel, put faith-filled hosannas into the mouths of people who now live without You. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, in love for us Your Son became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Teach us to look to You in every temptation so that drawing strength from You, we may resist Satan and our own sinful desires, obey Your commandments, and care for all people as Christ cares for us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, give Your protection and guidance to our prime minister, premier and mayor, and to all who make, administer and judge our laws, so that every life is protected and that people may live under justice in our country and in every nation of the world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, come to the rescue of all who are sick, injured, facing surgery or recovering from surgery [especially _____]. Help them, heal them, comfort them and encourage them in the way that You know to be best for each of them. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

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Lord of the Church, during this Holy Week, You call Your people from around the world to follow You through Your Passion, death and resurrection. Bless the service of all those who provide special music during this week, who read Your Holy Scriptures in the assembly, who proclaim Your suffering, death and resurrection — that Your flock would be fed and Your glory revealed. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your gracious care, heavenly Father, we place ourselves and everyone for whom we pray, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**



HOLY WEEK SERMON

PALM SUNDAY/SUNDAY OF THE PASSION

(Series B)

MARCH 24, 2024

Sermon Text: Zechariah 9:9; Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 14-15

“Our Humble King and Christ”

“Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey.” Holy Week is upon us. Today’s Gospel Reading finds us in the thick of the events of that week. Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem has happened. He has cleared the temple of the money changers, as we heard in the Gospel Reading a couple weeks ago. The whole city is stirred up. This miracle worker and preacher entered the city to great praise; and His presence there was like a line drawn in the sand. It demanded an answer . . . which side are you on? Each heart was pressed to say where it stood. Each ear that heard Jesus preach and teach in the temple was forced to contemplate and think about what it heard. Every eye was upon Jesus watching for a miracle or for a mistake; and every tongue in the city confessed something about Jesus either good or ill. And there was a buzz, ‘Had this Jesus really raised Lazarus from the dead in Bethany like people were saying?’ . . . ‘Some say they saw it with their own eyes and that Lazarus had been dead for four days! Who does such things?’

And what of the people who greeted this Jesus as He entered Jerusalem with their loud hosannas? They seemed to believe Jesus was maybe something even more . . . could He be the legitimate King of Israel, the long foretold son of David returning to His rightful throne? King Herod wouldn’t like this news, neither would the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, nor would the religious leaders in the temple. Because if that were true, it would not be just the hearts and ears and eyes and tongues that would need to believe, hear, see and confess this Jesus to be a preacher and teacher, miracle worker and prophet; if all that were true, if He was indeed the rightful king of Israel, then the knee would have to bend. Every knee in Jerusalem, in Israel, would need to bow, perhaps even theirs. But not everyone was ready to bend the knee to this Jesus. And so it is in every generation and in every place, all the way down through time to our very day.

You and I know that Jesus was even more than a long expected king. He’s the King of Kings and the Lord of lords; and as St. Peter had confessed – “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” He’s not like other kings. In the past few weeks, the appointed Scripture Readings have pressed us to think about how we see Jesus, how the world sees

Him and who He truly is. To see Jesus rightly is a gift of faith. The struggle for many in the days of His public ministry was to see past Jesus' humble appearance and truly see that He was, is and ever shall be God in the flesh. This is still a struggle today.

Had Jesus arrived in Jerusalem with His followers and disciples trailing behind Him as a book of Exodus style glorious manifestation of God, as a mighty pillar of cloud or fire . . . Had He swooped down in a fiery chariot with horses aflame with holy fire with Elijah sitting at His side; would the knees of the Sadducees and Pharisees, and the scribes and the chief priests and the elders of the people all have bent and bowed down? Would every one of their tongues have confessed that Jesus Christ was Lord, to the glory of God the Father? Perhaps they would have; but it would have been out of surprise and fear for the loss of their position in society. Jesus, however, did not arrive in Jerusalem in that way. He arrived in the most humble way of all in order to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah, "Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey" . . . which ought to have been a clue for the learned and well taught among those who lived in Jerusalem. The palm branches, the strewn cloaks along His path, the loud 'Hosannas' hardly scratched the surface of the praise His arrival warranted. Even His triumphal entry was humble when you realise who He really is.

Let's press this a bit further. Let's say every time the pastor stood at the altar and said the Words of Institution a pillar of cloud and fire appeared and sparks of flame shot forth landing on all the faithful forgiving their sins, burning their sins away in the crucible of all consuming righteous fire; but for all who do not believe, they were driven out of the church by the sight of the God's almighty presence by a host of angels. How many times would that have to happen before even the most credulous and sceptical of people took this to heart and wrestled with God over their faith or lack thereof?

But what if instead, at the invitation of Jesus, when the pastor stood at the altar and said the Words of Institution, Jesus arrived in the most humble of ways in, with, and under the bread and wine placed there by His faithful believers on plates and cups of silver and gold fit for a King? And then, one by one they would each receive Jesus by simply eating the meal He gave them to eat in remembrance of Him back during that first Holy Week – on that Thursday night in which He was betrayed? And what if week in and week out for thousands of years Christians remembered Him in this way and trusted that He truly is with them always to the end of the age? And not just spiritually in their baptism, but with His very body and blood in Holy Communion. Well, only those with eyes of faith, who had been taught God's Word and believed what was found there, would be able to discern the real presence of Christ Jesus there in the meal just as He promises it is. And when you know, trust and believe this to be true – by the cherished God-given gift of faith; then, your knee will bow and your tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. And where else would you rather be than in His presence?!

Back to those who would not, could not, and flat out refused to see that Jesus was, is and ever shall be the Son of God, the Christ. They were put out by His faultless fulfilment of the perfect Law of the Lord. They knew the Law and they disliked being shown up over and over and over again, because the scribes and the elders of the people, the chief priests and the Sadducees and Pharisees all in their own way acted as examples to the people when it came to showing and teaching how a good Jewish person should follow the Law of God. They . . . not Jesus . . . were to do this work of living and teaching – and were the ones who then plotted Jesus' death. Of course, this would have to wait

until the Passover celebrations were finished, lest they spoil the holidays. But thanks to Judas their plans were accelerated. They even sought a way to use the Romans garrisoned in the city to have Jesus killed and removed from the public discourse in a way that would publicly keep their hands clean while ridding themselves of Jesus and His public teaching. However, their plan to have Jesus' life-blood poured out unto death was flawed. They were seeking to empty Jesus of His earthly power through death; but they had no idea how much there was to empty, because they didn't know who Jesus truly was, is and ever shall be.

In our own time we find individuals and groups who aren't satisfied simply with not believing in Jesus and not bending their knee or confessing Jesus to be the Son of God with their tongue. Yes, even in our own day there are those who try to crucify Jesus all over again – with claims that He never existed . . . or that Jesus was only a man and not God . . . or by fighting to make universities secular by debasing Jesus in every way imaginable.

The efforts of the scribes and the elders of the people, the chief priests and the Sadducees and Pharisees had, however, only marginal temporary success. They hardly enjoyed three days rest from Jesus when, before they knew it, Jesus was risen from the dead; and following that first Easter, Jesus' disciples emboldened by His resurrection from the dead became an immovable force through history. Jesus' disciples, and those who followed after them, tasted from the cup that Christ drank down to the dregs at His cross. They faced martyrdom, persecution and imprisonment with joy because they finally understood what Jesus had taught them when He said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." And because their fear of the Lord was transformed by Christ into a healthy and good expression of respect and new obedience bolstered by the knowledge that God loved them and had saved them in Christ, they were then free never to face the tyrants of this world because they had no real power over them . . . their judgments over them would prove to be short-lived, they could not grant new life or eternal life. The fear of such men evaporated from their minds. And as in their day, so it is in our day when you know this and believe it; for the plans of such men and women to empty Jesus of His power in the lives of Christians and in the life of the world is flawed. Their perennial seeking to empty Jesus of His earthly power will come to nothing because they, like those who came before them, have no idea how much there is to empty in Christ Jesus, because they, like those who came before them, do not know who Jesus truly was, is and ever shall be.

In the last hundred years we have seen people try to stamp out Jesus and His followers in places like Russia; and when those hostile to Jesus and His church fall out of favour and out of power, we've then witnessed the church flourish again . . . like one risen from the dead. Jesus by the Holy Spirit resurrects them to new life. In the heat of persecution, in the heat of the attack, the church is often reduced to the most humble of settings . . . all the beautiful things bit by bit are stripped away until the church appears to hang naked with Christ upon the cross of public crucifixion, looking to all the world as one practically dead. We have not known such a thing here in Canada, but it doesn't mean it can't come to us. But whether the future of the church is bright or dim matters not when you know where you stand and to whom you bend your knee.

Were Jesus' disciples and followers always good at confessing Jesus as Lord, to the glory of God the Father? Are we always good at confessing Jesus as Lord, to the glory of God the Father? Not hardly! The disciples struggled to do so during the end of that first Holy Week. They ran away from Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when they could

have stood firm; and we, like the disciples, may at times also find ourselves running away into the night as they did when the mob comes to assail and arrest us. We may even wriggle out of our clothes to run away naked into the night . . . as that one young man in the Gospel of Mark is recorded to have done. We might find ourselves like Peter when asked by hostile voices if we follow Jesus . . . denying that we even know Him. We won't all fail in these ways, but some of us have done so and will do so. And if things become really dire and dangerous, if the line is drawn hard in the sand and we are forced to publicly answer the question of whose side we are on . . . there will be some of us who could fall into sin who we might not expect to. But in whatever circumstance in which you find yourself, be encouraged. Christ died for you, and by His death your sins are forgiven. You are now free, in Christ, to stand firm in your faith and confess Him without fear. And when you are able to confess Christ to your friends and family, to your neighbour and community, you are now free to follow Jesus' example and confess Him as your Lord, the very Son of God, with humility, and you don't need fancy words or grand gestures to do it.

To be sure, there is a time and place for the honourable and the beautiful, a time to see Jesus' transfigured and shining like the sun, as we saw Him at the end of the season of Epiphany with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration when we were about to start our journey to Holy Week; just as there is a time and a place to look upon the crushed and afflicted Jesus, beaten and hung upon the cross of Good Friday. A time and place to know the heights and depths of the glory of God, the fullness of Jesus' love for us that drove Him to be obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross for us all. "Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey" . . . humble and mounted upon a cross, humble and mounted upon simple bread and wine, humble and mounted upon words preached from the pulpit and spoken to you from the pages of Holy Scripture.

In the pillar of cloud and fire Jesus emptied Himself to be visible to the children of Israel while He was rescuing them from captivity. In the incarnation when He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, Jesus emptied Himself to live among us and walk in our shoes, drawing our humanity into Himself in order to faultlessly keep the perfect Law of the Lord in our place. And at the cross Jesus emptied Himself of His very life for you – emptied Himself by pouring Himself into our lives in order to be present with us in this life and in our death; empties Him year-in and year-out in service of His creation, choosing the humble path so we can be redeemed and saved. This Holy Week we hear and see this wondrous love unfold once again. What a blessed joy to be able to bend the knee at the coming of our humble Lord and King, and confess Him to be the very Son of God! Amen.