

Palm Sunday/ April 8-9, 2017

Homily based upon Matt 21:1-11 Isaiah 50:4-7; Phil 2:6-11; Matt. 26:1-27:66

“Hosanna, to the Son of David: blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. O king of Israel: Hosanna in the highest.” Read at the beginning of Mass today, and itself hearkens to Psalm 118, itself a “thanksgiving liturgy,” accompanying a procession of the king and the people into the Temple precincts. The people are confidently imploring God’s help against hostile threats.<sup>1</sup>

This day is perhaps as paradoxical as any in the liturgical year. Our palm branches are carefully prepared, nicely separated and for the most part de-tassled, smooth and not yet all dried up. Sometimes, they are beautifully woven into crosses. And yet, in the span of a few short days, our Lord and Savior experiences the cries of the crowd, turning into the jeers of the angry mob.

“Hosanna, Son of David.” The word comes from the Hebrew meaning “Save, please.” It was a passionate plea to God for help, though in this context, it is used in a triumphal sense. But as the Feast of Tabernacles gradually changed from a feast of petition into one of praise, so too the cry for help turned into a shout of jubilation. Pope Benedict XVI once explained:

In the Hosanna acclamation, then, we find an expression of the complex emotions of the pilgrims accompanying Jesus and of his disciples: joyful praise of God at the moment of the processional entry, hope that the hour of the Messiah had arrived, and at the same time a prayer that the Davidic kingship and hence God’s kingship over Israel would be reestablished.<sup>2</sup>

“Hosanna” is both a cry for salvation and a declaration of praise.

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<sup>1</sup> New American Bible, footnote to Psalm 118:26

<sup>2</sup> Pope Benedict XVI: “Jesus of Nazareth Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection” Ignatius Press, 2011, page 7

Rather than “Save, please,” it now means, “Salvation has come.” *Hosanna* is the triumphant cry, proclaiming to the whole city that Jesus, the Son of **David**, has made His entrance as her King.

And yet even today, this cry can indeed remain a cry for deliverance. Just this morning, in Tanta Egypt, 100 km north of Cairo, a Coptic Orthodox Church in the Nile Delta was bombed in the middle of the Palm Sunday liturgy. Another was bombed in Alexandria. Nearly fifty are dead and even more injured, all simply because they went to church on Palm Sunday and worship Jesus as Lord. “Save, please,” takes on a whole new meaning, as we beg the Lord to send his peace to a broken world.

[If our procession means anything at all, it must be an image of something deeper.] All Christians are united today in crying out for Him to save us, and we pledge that we will accompany Him along the path that leads to our freedom. Let us walk each step to Calvary, celebrating the Sacred Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday as best as we are able.

The paradox of Palm Sunday is stark. The same crowd one moment soon began calling for His death. Such is the fickle heart of man, and yet our Lord reaches out to save us. He answers our plea: *Hosanna, filio David*- “Save, I pray, to the Son of David.”