Palm Sunday 2021
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
Philippians 2.5- 11   St. Matthew 21.1-13
✠

Everybody loves a parade…a common expression from an anonymous source. Most of us have used it at least once in our lifetimes.

We love our Palm Sunday Parade. Last year we weren't able to hold in-person Mass and our Parade was cancelled. We're still navigating through Coronatide…but we can thank God things have improved and this year we were able to have our Palm Sunday Parade.

Parades stir up all kinds of emotions. We have Saint Patrick's Day parades. We have Independence Day parades. We have Thanksgiving Day parades. Last year most parades went Virtual. It wasn't quite the same…was it?

Palm Sunday commences the final week of Lent. We began today's Liturgy by hearing Matthew's account of Jesus' humble entry into Jerusalem riding a donkey. We recreated the Gospel and processed around the church, singing the famous hymn by St. Theodulph, the 9th Century Bishop of Orleans (France):

 "All glory, laud, and honor, to thee, Redeemer, King! To whom the lips of children, made sweet hosannas ring."

Like the crowd on that first Palm Sunday…our mood as we processed around the church is happy and joyful. Perhaps many of those who watched Jesus remembered the prophecy from Zechariah written 600 years earlier:

 "Rejoice, rejoice, people of Zion! Shout for joy, you people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you! He comes triumphant and victorious, but humble and riding on a donkey."

The crowd threw Palm branches down on the road as Jesus passed by...a sign of honor and respect. They shouted,

 "Praise to David's Son! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise be to God!"

Then we heard Matthew's Passion. It is not a pretty story. In less than one week the mood of the crowd has changed. They are angry. Jesus wasn't the king they were expecting. He hadn't come to free them from the grip of the oppressive Roman occupation. Jesus would later tell Pilate his kingdom was not of this world.

As the week progresses the crowd's mood changes even more. A mob mentality develops…led by the chief priests and elders…jealous of Jesus' popularity…afraid of losing their power and grip over the people...determined to get what they wanted all along…a dead Jesus! And Pilate, afraid of a full-scale riot, washes his hands of the whole thing.

Our mood will change by the time we leave here today. We will sing our Closing Hymn:

"Ride on! Ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die;
Bow thy meek head to mortal pain,
Then take, O God, thy power and reign."

Holy Week is a time of stark contrasts. Palm Sunday sets the stage for the entire week. We will experience the high and low of Maundy Thursday. We will experience the darkest day in the history of mankind…Good Friday. We will experience the uncertainty of Easter Even. We will experience the immense joy of Easter.

We have a distinct advantage over the angry the crowd of that first Holy Week because we know how the story turns out. It's not what the crowd expected…it's not what Jesus's closest friends expected. It's not what we expect from Jesus our King. Ultimately…the Palm Sunday story is our story…we are the crowd…we wouldn't have acted any differently. And we ask ourselves…why did King Jesus have to die?

Paul writes in his Letter to the Philippians the real reason Jesus came to us. He is God's Son...who came to us as a human being...and was obedient to his Father. His love for us was so strong that he was willing to give up his own life for us...so our sins could be forgiven once and for all time. And God has given him a Name above every other Name…Joshua…Jesus…God Saves!

We are now 2000 years removed from the events of that first Palm Sunday. Our Annual Palm Sunday Parade and Liturgical observances of Holy Week should remind us we are doing what orthodox Catholic Christians have been doing for centuries. And so we wave our palms and shout out to everyone who will listen,

 "God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord!"
✠