

VI Lent 2024 (Palm Sunday)
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
Saint Matthew 21.1-9



Today we turn the clock back to the First Sunday in Advent...that's where the Palm Sunday Story really begins...and where we find the Gospel account from Matthew of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey...and people throwing down palm branches and coats.

We just re-enacted the first Palm Sunday by blessing palms and processing around the Church. We sang the great hymn "All Glory, Laud and Honor" by Saint Theodulph, the 9th Century Bishop of Orleans. We proclaimed Jesus to be our Good and Gracious King.

The Gospel appointed in the *Prayer Book* for Palm Sunday is the Passion According to Matthew. There is no reference to donkeys, palms or processions. The Reformers disliked blessing objects and processions. What we do here is consistent with what Catholic Christians have done since the 4th Century, and with what the Jewish priests in the Temple did before Jesus was born. We bless objects, we dedicate them to God, and we have processions that praise and glorify his Name.

600 years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Zechariah wrote, "*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.*" And the crowd went wild! They shouted, "*Praise to David's Son! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise to God!*"

The next stop on Jesus' historic ride into Jerusalem was the Temple...God's house. Malachi, who prophesied around the same time as Zechariah wrote, "*...the Lord you are looking for will suddenly come to his Temple.*" This is not the first time Jesus came suddenly to the Temple.

When Jesus was eight days old, Mary and Joseph brought him to the Temple to be circumcised...they called his name, Jesus...God Saves! When he was 40 days old, they brought Jesus to the Temple to present him to God and so Mary could be purified

after giving birth to Jesus. And when he was 12 years old, Mary and Joseph found him talking with religious teachers in the Temple...he told them he was doing God's work in his house.

Through the Palm Sunday Procession and the other Holy Week liturgies, Saint Joseph Parish becomes Jerusalem. We are the crowd waving palm branches at Jesus. And we follow him to the Temple. And we wait for what happens next.

To get the rest of the Palm Sunday Story we have to go back to the Advent Sunday Gospel. Jesus is angry at the disrespectful way the people are treating God's house. The currency exchange people are charging high rates; the people who sold pigeons are ripping off their own people. Jesus told them they had turned God's house into a hideout for robbers. And the priests and Temple leaders became angry when they saw Jesus heal people, and how happy the people were. Why? They saw Jesus as a threat to their own security and the influence they had over the people.

The enthusiasm the crowd had for Jesus at the beginning of first Palm Sunday quickly turns to disappointment...he wasn't the kind of King they were expecting...then their disappointment turns to outright hatred...he had the audacity to proclaim himself to be God. Their happy shouting of "*Praise to David's Son*" was replaced by angry shouting of "*Kill him!*"

Over the next few days we will walk with Jesus as he continues to preach and teach and heal. We will walk with him and be his guests at the Last Supper and receive his Body and Blood. We will walk with him to the Garden outside Jerusalem where we will witness his betrayal and arrest. We will walk with him on his journey to the cross and watch him complete his mission of redemption? And we will watch him die for us.

What kind of King is Jesus? He is indeed our Good and Gracious King!

