

Palm Sunday 2025

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

St. Matthew 21.1-9 Hymns #62 and #64 (H1940)



Everyone loves a parade! Anyone who has gone to the Tournament of Roses Parade held every year in Pasadena CA, is amazed by the colorful flower-covered floats, marching bands, and equestrian units. Tickets for the 2026 Rose Parade, are on sale now. Get your order in early!

We just had a parade of our own. We carried palm branches and crosses and sang a hymn of praise. We proclaimed Jesus to be our “good and gracious King”. Palm Sunday begins with a note of celebration.

Six hundred years before the event we just re-enacted, the Prophet Zechariah wrote...*“Look, your King is coming to you; He is humble and rides on a donkey and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

What kind of king rides into town on a donkey? A king is supposed to ride on a horse with an army of soldiers marching in front of him...a signal for the people to get out of the way...their king is coming...a sign of who is really in charge. Jesus is a different kind of king.

What kind of king were the people expecting? They already had a King...his name is God! In the Old Testament, God declares himself to be THE King who loves his people and cares for them...and they are HIS people. But the people wanted a human king they could hear, and see, and touch, just like all other human kings.

In the First Book of Samuel, we read God told Samuel to listen to the people, and give them exactly what they wanted...a human king. He told Samuel...*“They are not rejecting you; they are rejecting me as their King.”*

Samuel warned the people what it would be like to have a human king...*“He would wage war and send their sons off to fight and die; he would force their daughters to work in the palace and cook for him and make things smell nice; he will tax the people unfairly.”* Everything Samuel said would happen did happen. Now their country was occupied by a foreign power and they had a king...his name was Caesar.

The enthusiastic crowd followed Jesus as he continued his ride on the donkey into Jerusalem. If they were expecting another David, they were going to be

disappointed. Jesus didn't tell them to take up arms and mount a revolt against Caesar and his government. Instead he went directly to the Temple. Suddenly things take a dramatic turn.

Outside the Temple, merchants sold doves for Temple sacrifices. A currency exchange office traded Roman money for Temple money, the only money accepted in the Temple. The merchants were selling doves at inflated prices; the currency exchange office wasn't offering favorable rates. Both were ripping off their own people.

Jesus wasn't happy at what he saw and in a display of righteous Godly anger overturns tables and quoting the Prophet Jeremiah said to the merchants...*"This is God's house...a house of prayer; You have turned it into a hideout for robbers."*

It would not take long for the enthusiasm the crowd had for Jesus to change into outright hatred. Their shouts of...*"Praise to David's Son! Bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise be to God!"* would by the end of the week turn into shouts of...*"Crucify him!"*

Holy Week is a time of stark contrasts in the life of Jesus and his disciples, the crowd following him, and in our lives as we walk with Jesus on his journey to the Cross. Through the Holy Week liturgies, Saint Joseph Parish becomes Jerusalem. We are the crowd welcoming Jesus with palm branches. We are the crowd at the Temple. We are with Jesus and the disciples on Maundy Thursday. And we will be at the foot of the Cross on Good Friday.

Our Palm Sunday celebration began on a high note. The parade continues, but the tone is different. We sing...*"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."*

Lowly and pomp seems like a contradiction in terms. Lowly..."humble"; Pomp..."extravagant". Think about Bethlehem. Jesus was born in a barn; he wasn't born in a castle. Jesus didn't have servants; he came to serve. He walked among us, so one day we might walk with him in his Kingdom in Heaven.

Jesus...is indeed our good and gracious King!

