

April 5, 2020 . The Passion Sunday

The Passion of our Lord: A Selfless and Humble Sacrifice that Won our Redemption

Dear brothers and sisters, the celebration of Passion Sunday begins the Holy Week of Redemption. The Liturgy of today is a summary of the suffering, crucifixion and death of our Lord. This was the cost of our redemption! These are the events we relive and re-enact on the Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

As St Andrew of Crete explained, "Today he returns from Bethany and proceeds of his own free will toward his holy and blessed passion, to consummate the mystery of our salvation."¹ Please note dearly beloved in Christ that Bethphage on the Mount of Olives was indicated by the ancient prophecy as the place through which God would enter Jerusalem to defend it against its enemies. The enemy of man is sin, death and devil. Our Lord entered the city from the mount of Olive to combat and vanquish these enemies. "

¹ Andrew of Crete, *A Sermon*, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the king of Israel, in The Office of the Readings on Passion Sunday.

How did our Lord do this? He did not use the weapons of the world or that of the enemy. The enemy's weapons are pride, rebellion, disobedience and defiance. "The Lord used humility, obedience and an open ear to the Father. As the first reading described, "Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear; and I have not rebelled, have not turned back. I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting" (Isaiah 50:4-6). This is contrary to Adam and Eve who through fear of death rebelled and disobeyed God and "had been subject to slavery all their life" (Hebrews 2:15).

When the hour of combat with the filth of the world dawned, The Lord remained true to combat style as described in the prophecy above. He did not enter the city of Destiny with pomp and pageantry. He came in humility symbolized by the donkey on which he rode. "Say to daughter Zion," Behold: your king is coming to you, a just savior is he, humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9).

Our Lord's entry into Jerusalem brought together the rites of enthronement of the kings (2 Kings 9:13), the feast of the tabernacle (Leviticus 23:39-40) and the re-dedication of the temple (2 Maccabees 10:5-8). These rites are spreading cloth on a donkey for the anointed king and spreading leaves and palm branches on the ground

accompanied with great rejoicing. Jesus is the King, the temple and the Holy One who dwelt the tabernacle or booth during the period of Exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Though Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lord, the one through whom all things were made, he did not achieve victory by the way of terror and intimidation. The Bible is clear on this, "Though he was in the form of God, Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:6-8).

The Passion narrative gives details of the royal way of the cross and the suffering through which our Lord brought our redemption. Greater love than has no man that he lays down his life for his friends (John 15:13). Instead of letting man suffer for their iniquities, our Lord offered himself to take away the sins of the world. He knew that man cannot do it by themselves and also that, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take sins away. For this reason, when he came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire but a body you prepared for me; holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight in. Then I said, 'As is written of me in the scroll,

Behold, I come to do your will, O God” (Hebrews 10:5-8). The will of God is that none of us will be lost. This will means the drinking the chalice of passion and death as our Lord did. The Lord made plain to us the power of crucifixion and death when he said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself" (John 12:32).

Because the Lord Jesus laid down his life for our sake, God the Father in union with the Holy Spirit, "Highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every other name, so that at Jesus' name every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God the Father : JESUS CHRIST IS LORD!(Philippians 2:9-11).

"By dying Jesus submitted to the laws of the underworld; by rising again he destroyed them. He did away with the everlasting character of death so as to make death a thing of time, not of eternity."² "As all die in Adam, so all will be brought to life in Christ" (1Corinthians 15:22).

What did the people do in response to the Lord as he entered Jerusalem and what are we to do?

² St Leo the Great, A sermon, The cross of Christ is the source of all blessings, the cause of all graces, in the Office of the Readings, Tuesday of the 5th Week of Lent.

The people shouted Hosanna Son of David, meaning, bring salvation. They spread palm branches and leaves as they sang Psalm 118 blessing God and invoking him to come and save them. Hosanna is also an urgent prayer for rain among the ancient Israelites. May it be on our lips an urgent prayer to the Lord to wash away the scourge of corona virus.

What are we to do in appreciation of what he has done for us? Is it merely to spread palm branches, leaves and paper towels? No, we shall do something more! Like the children of Israel, we shall cry out from the heart to the Lord to bring us salvation! We shall present ourselves to him as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1). In the words of St Andrew of Crete, "Let us spread before his feet, not garments or soulless olive branches, which delight the eye for a few hours and then wither, but ourselves, clothed in his grace, or rather, clothed completely in him." What does this mean? He died to cleanse us of sin and bring us to salvation, so we must remain clean! If any stain of sin clings to us we must expunge it through repentance and the sacraments he gave us. This honors the Lord who selflessly gave his for our redemption.

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