

Passion Sunday

17th April 2011

Liturgy of the Palms: Luke 19: 28–44, Isaiah 50: 4–9a, Ps 31: 9–18, Philippians 2: 5–11, Matthew 26: 14 – 27: 66 or 27: 11–54

We emerge from Lent to celebrate Palm or Passion Sunday; we read the passion narrative, we receive new palm crosses, and we ready ourselves for Holy Week, which will bring us to the great three days of our Easter liturgy. This is where we are. The liturgy and the lectionary of the church can offer us something of a spectator sport, or an art form that we can look at in wonder. Often the liturgy and the lectionary of the church seem to have a parallel in line with various heritage festivals and becomes a memorial, a remembering of a past era. But the liturgy of the church, the readings of the ancient sacred texts, also are an invitation to each and to all to embody the Word of God, an invitation into the gospel.

Today we've heard the gospel differently; it is put back into the mouths of the people. On every other Sunday it is heard in the voice of those who have been designated to read it. Today it flows more freely, a voice from the community and of the community: that gives the gospel a different voice. That change, that movement in the voice of the gospel that we experience today is a wonderful reflection of the movement in the gospel narrative that we celebrate today.

In the voice of a literal church, today celebrates Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem; it is an historic movement. However, when the same story is heard in our own voice, and when we give voice, then that movement is brought into the present and it becomes the movement of transformation. Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday are not about the life and times of Jesus, rather they are revelations of the Divine in and through the Life of Jesus. This is underlined in the second reading today, Philippians 2:5, *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus*: no difference - do not ascribe to Christ anything that you cannot ascribe to yourself. These are our own life narratives that we are hearing. Palm Sunday sets OUR face toward Jerusalem, and toward all that is revealed in the process of Easter.

In the liturgy of Holy week and Easter, new light is shed on ancient stories, ancient sacred texts. Adam and Eve were transformed in the Garden of Eden and Mary will witness another transformation in another garden. Noah emerges from the ark as a sign of life to be lived in a new paradigm. Jesus will walk from the same tomb. From what will we emerge in our journey through Easter? Moses leads a people out of slavery, through the wilderness into a land of promise. Jesus walks the same path with us through Holy Week.

We have spent time with the Prodigal Son in our Lent reflections – the one who sought life and found life in his father’s embrace. We will be called into that same embrace with the words “*into your hands I commend my Spirit*”. Likewise, Zacchaeus climbed a tree to rise above the crowd; Jesus too will reveal that same process and will give himself into that same movement that we too might see its truth. It is as if every story that illustrates life is given voice in the mystery of the passion and is embodied for us in the movement of the passion of Easter.

This week we will make choices, we will choose to either watch the game or we will choose to participate in the game. Today, with the preparation of Lent behind us and the promise of Easter before us we are like chocolate bunnies on a shelf in Coles. Looking good, but going nowhere – Yet! This week will determine our tomorrow. We will either be consumed by Easter, as Christ was, or we will be left on the shelf to be paraded again next year, if our use-by-date does not expire in the meantime.

The narrative of Easter, the encounter of Easter, the revelation of Easter are made real when the eggs are consumed. Resurrection speaks of a new paradigm: it is not a simple raising of the dead that Lazarus already encountered, it is much, much more. Easter points us toward a life that is not bounded by fear, a life that is not contained by the small self of life’s experience. Easter calls us from this tomb of darkness into a vision of life that is embraced in and by the Divine, a life lived in eternity and experienced within the wholeness of all creation.

May we each, each and every one of us, be consumed by the encounter of Easter.

The Lord be with you.
Peter Humphris