

Palm Sunday
March 25, 2018
Fr. Rick Lorenz

Reflection

When we held our palm branches and listened to this Gospel, we joined ourselves to generations of Jewish people. They held palm branches as they celebrated deliverance by God, defeats of their enemies, and purification from desecration. We join ourselves as well to the great multitude in heaven, proclaiming salvation from the lamb who gave himself. We'll take these palms home and put them in the crosses on our walls. They'll remind us our blessings: ones we've received, ones we can look forward to getting, ones that we've forgotten or accepted as our due. They can also remind us of the sins that we've forgotten.

We're about to hear more Scripture. The first reading and the psalm anticipate the redemptive suffering that would be accomplished by Jesus. Paul tells the Philippians that Jesus is exalted by his obedience: obedience unto death, death on a cross, a sacrifice that sets us free. In our fallen nature, we join ourselves to those who clamored for his crucifixion. But through grace, other responses are possible too. St. Gregory of Nazienzen shares these words.

"Let us join the choirs of angels in offering God upon his heavenly altar a sacrifice of praise. We must now pass through the first veil and approach the second, turning our eyes toward the Holy of Holies.

Jn 12:12-16
Isa 50:4-7
Ps 22
Phil 2:6-11
Mk 14:1-15:47

I will say more: we must sacrifice ourselves to God, each day and in everything we do, accepting all that happens to us for the sake of the Word, imitating his passion by our sufferings, and honoring his blood by shedding our own. We must be ready to be crucified.

If you are a Simon of Cyrene, take up your cross and follow Christ. If you are crucified beside him like one of the thieves, now, like the good thief, acknowledge your God. For your sake, and because of your sin, Christ himself was regarded as a sinner; for his sake, therefore, you must cease to sin.

Worship him who was hung on the cross because of you, even if you are hanging there yourself. Derive some benefit from the very shame; purchase salvation with your death. Enter paradise with Jesus, and discover how far you have fallen. Contemplate the glories there, and leave the other scoffing thief to die outside in his blasphemy.

If you are a Joseph of Arimathea, go to the one who ordered his crucifixion, and ask for Christ's body. Make your own the expiation for the sins of the whole world. If you are a Nicodemus, like the man who worshiped God by night, bring spices and prepare Christ's body for burial. If you are one of the Mary's, or Salome, or Joanna, weep in the early morning. Be the first to see the stone rolled back, and even the angels perhaps, and Jesus himself."