

PALM SUNDAY/PASSION SUNDAY (MATTHEW 21. 1-11)

Friends, first of I pass on my Palm Sunday greetings to you. This Sunday is also called 'Passion Sunday'. Because this week punctuates two processions – the first one, going into Jerusalem, and the other... coming out of Jerusalem heading to Golgotha. The first one is a joyful procession, the 'triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem' (which we have just listened from the gospel)... the crowd carrying palm leaves and shouting 'Hosanna!' – but the other one is a dreadful procession, people shouting 'crucify' and Jesus carrying the cross. These two intensely different dramas take place during this week – and so, we call this day - Palm Sunday as well as Passion Sunday.

We will stay with the Palm Sunday theme today as we have service on Good Friday to put our minds across to the other theme.

I hope that all members of this Parish have received Palm Crosses by post. I am so glad that Pamela has taken that task of posting them to you. Palm leaves are recognised widely as a symbol of peace. So the palm crosses that you have now – is a sign of peace from the Lord of Peace that the Church is passing on to you. And cross symbolizes Christ's ultimate victory over sin and death. So, the cross in palm leaves is the assurance that there is hope – so to stay calm during these difficult days. There is 'life' beyond these uncertain times. Life will spring up and blossom around us - and everything will be fine.

Another symbol of peace on the Palm Sunday story - is the donkey that Jesus uses. Using a donkey instead of a horse is highly symbolic. It represents the humble arrival of someone in peace – so I pray and greet you, 'Peace be with you' on this special day – and pray that may the God of Peace reside in your minds – and places where you are now.

There is a funny story about this donkey/donkeys. (Mark, Luke and John say that it was a donkey – and Mathew says (as per today's reading) Jesus asked the disciples to bring a donkey and a colt– so they brought both – and Jesus used both – (21.2, 7). Whatever that is... here is a story for you.

Disciples brought this donkey to Jesus – put their cloths on it – people spread garments on the road – leafy branches as well – holding palm leaves they started singing 'hosanna'. Observing all these the donkey got confused – it got surprised. This poor creature thought that all this honour and praise were given to it - and it became very proud. After the procession it returned

– but that night this poor animal could not sleep. Somehow it managed to wait till the dawn. Early morning, it started walking into the streets of Jerusalem again - holding its head high, thinking that it will be welcomed and worshipped like the previous day. But nobody was even looking at it. Why? Nobody is looking at me? In order to get the attention of people it produced an ear breaking cry. We can imagine what kind of welcome was given by the people. It was a welcome with stones and sticks.

This story offers us a valuable message – and points to a life without Christ’s presence – and also, engaging in God’s mission without Christ’s presence.

The blessings we have in our lives – respect, acceptance, and appreciation – achievements in our lives – it is because of God’s presence in us. Sometime when we reach a certain level of success in life we tend to forgot God’s presence that has guided us and moulded us – and mistake our success as our own achievement – become proud – and forget God. And thus when we reject God’s presence in our lives we will be facing the world relying only on our strength and wisdom. Often we become tired - disappointed – and wonder why. So this story reminds us of the need of God’s presence in our lives – and confirm God’s presence in our thoughts, words, and deeds – and face the world with fresh energy and a renewed spirit.

This presence of God is very much essential as we engage in God’s mission as well. We have seen several servants of God once well accepted and received – who have done great wonders in ministry – gradually declining, being rejected - and disappearing from the scene. It is not because their ideas were bad and... their goals were wrong. But when they forgot God’s role in their ministry – the need for Christ’s presence in their ministry – they were left alone in their ministry without God’s power and Spirit working in them and with them. And the Church is often rejected and denied by many.

So this donkey story, though an imaginary one, brings valuable lessons to Christian living. Let this morning be a time for us of calling on God’s presence in our lives – and submitting ourselves to God’s design.

In the name of God who is creating, redeeming and sustaining, Amen.