



# He Speaks: Finding Christ in the Days of Lent

## Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

At the Procession with Psalms—Gospel Matthew 21:1-11

Readings: Isaiah 50: 4-7, Psalm 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-34, Philippians 2:6-11, Matthew 26:14–27:66

But he did not answer him one word...

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week and is familiar to us as the Sunday of the Great Paradox. The triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem before Mass, then the Passion narrative as the Gospel reading at Mass. Yes, yes—now where are the instructions for folding my palm leaf into a cross again? Oh, I think I saved it on my phone, just a moment.

Today, we are invited to hear this all again. For the fourteenth time, or the hundredth time, the Church is trying to help us prepare for Easter. And there are a handful of very striking moments in all this that can be easily overlooked.

And one of the big ones is: Jesus is not who anyone expected, or daresay, wanted. In his homily for Palm Sunday, 2021, Pope Francis said, "From the start, Jesus leaves us amazed. His people give him a solemn welcome, yet he enters Jerusalem on a lowly colt. His people expect a powerful liberator at Passover, yet he comes to bring the Passover to fulfillment by sacrificing himself. His people are hoping to triumph over the Romans by the sword, but Jesus comes to celebrate God's triumph through the cross. What happened to those people who in a few days' time went from shouting "Hosanna" to crying out "Crucify him"? What happened? They were following an *idea* of the Messiah rather than *the* Messiah."

How often do we, too, follow our ideas of God, rather than the God who actually shows up?

So it isn't just the paradox of the joyfulness of his entry into Jerusalem contrasted with the agony of his death on the cross. It's the paradox of Jesus himself. The God-Man. He said Blessed are the meek, turn the other cheek, whoever loses his life will find it, the first shall be last, strength in weakness, and all the rest. We are accustomed to hearing these words, and while we like the sound of them, we typically file them away under "nice but not very helpful."

"Do you not hear how many things they are testifying against you?" Pilate asked Jesus.

But he did not answer him one word.

Here is where we might have wanted someone to speak up, to defend himself, to put Pilate in his place—to stop this madness and win the day. But instead, Jesus keeps his mouth shut. And he let it all happen.

In his silence, he proved that every single word he preached... he also lived.

And so, by the time we kneel down at Mass, when Jesus gives up his spirit, we know that this has really happened. He really went to his death to save us. His silence shouts and screams at us from then to now, every Palm Sunday. It is his love that cries out. And like the stunned centurion at the foot of the cross, we fearfully, tearfully say, "Truly, this was the Son of God!"

Throughout Lent, Jesus has been speaking to us. Gently but firmly inviting us to a conversion of heart, to trust him to see us as we really are, to heal our physical and emotional wounds, and to free us from what keeps us from him. Today, his silence is also speaking. How will we respond?

Consider:

Jesus' teachings call for a different perspective on the world. One of the most challenging parts of discipleship is seeing suffering as a path to spiritual growth and a deeper relationship with him. When our suffering is united with Christ's, it can give meaning to those events that go far beyond the moment. What is one particular area of suffering you can offer to Christ this week?

Whisper Prayer:

Jesus, lead me.

Listening with the Church — Holy Week

The Living Tree

From *The Way of the Cross*, Caryl Houselander

Look at this cross, so much bigger than the man whose body will be stretched to fit it. So much higher than the height of the man who will be lifted up above the earth on it and who, being lifted up will draw all men to Himself. Christ receives it with joy because he knows that this is the dead weight that must have crushed mankind had He not lifted it from their backs. This is the dead wood which at His touch is transformed into a living tree. At His touch the hewn tree takes root again and the roots thrust down into the earth, and the tree breaks into flower.

Already in Bethlehem, when the newborn child lay in the manger, a secret bud shone on the tree of life. Now it is going to break into flower for ever, and that flower will sow the seeds of life that never die, for Christ is the flower and the seed.

Because Christ is to be stretched to the size of the cross, all those who love Him will grow to the size of it, not only to the size of man's suffering, which is bigger than man, but to the size of Christ's love that is bigger than all suffering.