

Homily
Palm Sunday
April 13, 2025

“Hosanna! Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.” Dear brothers and sisters, with this acclamation today we begin the solemn days we call Holy Week, a time of prayer, a time of profound sorrow, but also a time of undefeated hope.

We began our Mass today with the traditional procession of palms. Remembering the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, we joined those who walked with him, holding palms aloft and crying with enthusiasm for the Son of David, “the king who comes in the name of the Lord.” Jesus entered the city in triumph, as a foreshadowing of his ultimate victory, and the people were with him, they were ready to follow him, to be at the side of the king. And we walked that path too, eager to acclaim the king who is our Lord, eager to be at his side.

But our procession today, and the procession of Jesus into Jerusalem, was a foreshadowing of a very different kind of procession still to come. Just a few short days later, Jesus would walk through Jerusalem once again. But this time, instead of cries of acclamation, Jesus heard cries of condemnation and ridicule. Instead of people rushing to join him, his friends ran away and those who did follow along were eager to see his death. Instead of palms waving in jubilation, there was a cross that weighed him down.

This is the procession to Calvary, which we just recalled in the reading of our Lord’s Passion. Instead of joyful expectation, this journey seems to be a defeat, a total catastrophe for Jesus and for all who followed him. The whole world seemed to have turned against him, and that’s what sin does – it turns us away from Jesus. This is a journey of suffering, the suffering that Jesus willingly accepted out of love for us. It was a journey that ended with his death on the cross, a death that he willingly embraced so that we might live.

But there are moments of hope in this procession, moments when Jesus reassures us that he is still our Lord, still our Savior, still the Son of God. The very fact that Jesus was willing to endure this entire Passion, the fact that he chose this, is a cause for hope. He knew what awaited him, and he had the power to free himself from his enemies. But his love for us was too great. He embraced it all, he accepted the rejection, the denials, the mockery, the scourging, the nails, and the cross because he refused to abandon us, he could not turn his back on us in our need. In his Passion, this pilgrimage of suffering, Jesus shows us just how much God loves us, he shows us the faithfulness of God. And we are filled with hope, because God did all of this for us, to save us from sin and death, to open the way for us to eternal life.

Another moment of hope comes after Jesus has been crucified. In words that strike us to the heart, Jesus says, “Father forgive them, they know not what they do.” Father, forgive them! Even as his hands and feet were nailed to the cross, Jesus was asking forgiveness for his persecutors. And those words are for us too. He never stops thinking of us, even when he is enduring great pain. He turns to his Father and asks for mercy, not for the righteous but for sinners. With all his

heart, Jesus wants us to receive forgiveness, and he is willing to pay the ultimate price so we can receive it.

And yet another moment of hope comes in his words to the man crucified beside him. This man that we call the good thief has acknowledged his own sins, and he puts his faith in Jesus: “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And to this man, Jesus says, “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” Even as his life is slowly ebbing, Jesus does what only God can do: he assures this man of his salvation. And he reassures us too; if we also will repent and put our faith in him, we too will be with him in Paradise.

This procession, this way of the cross, was certainly a journey of suffering and sorrow for Jesus. And it’s a journey of sorrow for us too. But it is also a journey of hope, hope that is rooted in God’s love, his forgiveness, and his power to open the way for us to heaven. During this Jubilee Year, Pope Francis has called us to be pilgrims of hope, fellow travelers with Jesus who carried the cross for us. Even though the way to Calvary is hard to contemplate, we are filled with hope in the final outcome, hope in “the king who comes in the name of the Lord,” the king who has saved us.