

Homily for the Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion (April 13, 2025)

Readings:- Is 50:4-7; Phil 2:6-11; Lk 19:28-40; Procession);

Lk 22 14—23:56 (or 23:1-49) (Holy Mass)

My dear brothers and Sisters in Christ;

It is on Palm Sunday that we enter Holy Week, welcoming Jesus into our lives and asking Him to allow us a share in His suffering, death, and Resurrection. The Holy Week liturgies present us with the actual events of the dying and rising of Jesus. These liturgies enable us to experience in our lives here and now what Jesus went through then. Just as Jesus did, we, too, must lay down our lives freely by actively participating in the Holy Week liturgies. In doing so, we are allowing Jesus to forgive us our sins, heal the wounds in us caused by our sins and the sins of others, and transform us more completely into the image and likeness of God. But let us remember that Holy Week can become “holy” for us only if we actively and consciously take part in the liturgies of this week. During this week of the Passion — passionate suffering, passionate grace, passionate love, and passionate forgiving — each of us is called to remember the Christ of Calvary and then to embrace and lighten the burden of the Christ Whose passion continues to be experienced in the hungry, the poor, the sick, the homeless, the aged, the lonely, and the outcast. Today’s liturgy combines two moments seen in contrast: one of glory, — the welcome of Jesus into Jerusalem — the other of suffering: the drama of his trial which ends in his condemnation, crucifixion, and death. Let us rejoice and sing as Jesus comes into our life today. Let us also weep and mourn as his death confronts us with our sin. The African-American song asks the question, *“Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they nailed Him to a tree?”* The answer is yes, a definite yes. Yes, we were there in the crowd on both days, shouting, “Hosanna!” and later “Crucify Him!”

Hurray to Marconi: When the ‘Unsinkable Titanic’ sank in the abyss of the Atlantic Ocean on April 15, 1912, 1517 people lost their lives. However, 705 people escaped death thanks to the radio communication established between Titanic and Carpathia. When the radio message was received by RMS Carpathia, a transatlantic passenger steamship, it raced at high speeds to pick up the survivors in lifeboats. When Carpathia arrived in New York, Marconi who had invented and introduced radio communication, was at the port to receive the survivors. When the survivors heard that Marconi was there, they sang his praises saying he was their ‘saviour’ and they thronged to see him. — Two thousand years ago people sang the praises of Jesus in Jerusalem and they thronged to see him when they found out he had come to save them from their sins and give them new life. (Fr. Jose. P, CMI).

A short summary of important teachings from the readings of the day:- Today's first reading, the third of Isaiah's four Servant Songs, like the other three, foreshadows Jesus' own life and mission. The Refrain for today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 22), "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" plunges us into the heart of Christ's Passion. The Second Reading, taken from Paul's letter to the Philippians, is an ancient Christian hymn representing a very early Christian understanding of who Jesus is, and of how his mission saves us from sin and death. The first part of today's Gospel describes the royal reception Jesus received from his admirers, who paraded with him for a distance of the two miles between the Mount of Olives and the city of Jerusalem. In the second part of today's Gospel, we listen to/participate in a reading of the Passion of Christ according to Luke. We are challenged to examine our own lives in the light of some of the characters in the Passion story – like Peter who denied Jesus, Judas who betrayed Jesus, Herod who ridiculed Jesus, Pilate who acted against his conscience as he condemned Jesus to death on the cross, and the leaders of the people who preserved their position by getting rid of Jesus.

Today We are invited to reflect on and answer 6 questions:

- 1) Does Jesus weep over my sinful soul as he wept over Jerusalem at the beginning of his Palm Sunday procession?**
- 2) Am I a barren fig tree?** God expects me to produce fruits of holiness, purity, justice, humility, obedience, charity, and forgiveness. Do I? Or worse, do I continue to produce bitter fruits of impurity, injustice, pride, hatred, jealousy and selfishness?
- 3) Will Jesus need to cleanse my heart with his whip?** Jesus cannot tolerate the desecration of the temple of the Holy Spirit (which I have become), by my addiction to uncharitable, unjust, impure thoughts, words, and deeds; nor does Jesus praise my business mentality or calculation of loss and gain in my relationship with God, my Heavenly Father.
- 4) Do I welcome Jesus into my heart?** Am I ready to surrender my life to him during this Holy Week and welcome him into all areas of my life as my Lord and Saviour? Let us remember that we are all sinners who have crucified Jesus by our sins, but we are still able to turn to Jesus again to ask for pardon and mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is through the Passion of Jesus that we receive forgiveness: "*with His stripes we are healed.*" (Is 53:5).
- 5) Are we like the humble donkey that carried Jesus,** bringing Jesus' universal love, unconditional forgiveness, and sacrificial service to our families, places of work, and communities by the way we live our lives?
- 6) Don't we represent many characters in Jesus' passion story?** Peter who denied Jesus, Judas who betrayed Jesus, Apostles who fled for life, Pilate who betrayed his conscience, High Priest who abused his position, soldiers who inflicted unbearable pain on Jesus and people who welcomed Jesus on Palm Sunday and then betrayed him during his trial.

First reading, Isaiah 50:4-7, explained: In the middle section of the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapters 40-55, there are four short passages which scholars have called the *Songs of the Suffering Servant*. Today's first reading is the third Servant Song. These four songs are about a mysterious figure whose suffering brings about a benefit for the people. In the original author's mind, the servant was probably a figure for the people of Israel, or for a faithful remnant within the people. The *Songs* portrayed the antithesis of Israel's messianic expectations, because Israel expected a triumphant Messiah while the prophet foresaw a "suffering servant" Messiah. Jesus saw aspects of his own life and mission foreshadowed in the Servant Songs, and the Church refers to them in this time of solemn meditation on the climax of Jesus' earthly life. These songs foretell Jesus' conscious and active choice to remain faithful to his saving mission no matter what the cost: *"I have not ... turned back" and "I gave my back to those who beat me."* The kingship of Jesus was to mean suffering and humiliation, not just publicity and grandeur. In today's Responsorial Psalm, (Ps 22), the Psalmist puts his trust in Yahweh for deliverance and salvation. The context of this day's worship also conveys Jesus' confidence in God's protection in the midst of His trial and crucifixion. The passage encourages us to be companions of Jesus in suffering by offering our own sufferings in union with the redemptive sufferings of Christ, so that we may become collaborators in that suffering. The passage also challenges us to accept what we cannot change, so that we may endure the difficulty for as long as it is necessary, just as Christ did. (Personal application of the suffering servant prophecy: It is speaking to you and me on at least two levels. First, we meditate on the prophet's words, and recognize how much suffering Jesus went through for our salvation. Such meditation can only lead us to love him more and to desire that our will accord with his will at all times. Now at another level, we put ourselves into that prophetic scene. Wherever we see the word "I" or "me" we change that by inserting our own first name. In this way we will see that the Lord is calling us to imitate him. It can be an "aha" moment for us, a sudden understanding and a sudden call for a decision).

Second Reading, Philippians 2:6-11 explained: This section of Paul's Letter to the Philippians is an ancient Christological hymn representing a very early Christian understanding of Who Jesus is and how his mission saves us from sin and death. It is a message that Paul received from those who had been converted to Christ. It is a summary of *'the great mysteries of our redemption,'* and it rightly serves as a preview of the events of Holy Week. It describes how Jesus, though Son of God, *"emptied himself"* of divine glory and took the form of a man like us in all things except sin. Out of love and obedience, he willingly accepted his death, *"even death on a cross."* Because Jesus humbled himself and did not cling to any of his special privileges as

God's Son, *"God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above all names."* We are called to have the same attitude of humility and obedience as Christ our Lord had. Christians reading this passage today are joining the first people who ever pondered the meaning of Jesus' life and mission. We're singing their song and reciting their creed during this special time of the year, when we remember the most important things Our Lord did. God humbled himself for us! Jesus' triumph was his self-giving on the cross to open for us the road to the Father. All we can do in response is to bow our heads in awe, and present our loving, contrite hearts to God, begging for mercy. God wants our heart to be humbled, contrite, and truly repentant because only in that condition is it open, and so able, to receive His Mercy and His Love.

The Gospel Readings: The first part of today's Gospel (Lk 19:28-40) describes the royal reception which Jesus received from his admirers. They paraded with him for two miles: from the Mount of Olives to the city of Jerusalem. Two-and-a-half million people were normally present to celebrate the Jewish feast of the Passover. Jesus permitted such a royal procession for two reasons: 1) to reveal to the public that he was the promised Messiah, and 2) to fulfil the prophecies of Zechariah (9:9): *"Rejoice heart and soul, daughter of Zion.... see now your King comes to you; he is victorious, triumphant, humble and riding on a donkey..."*, and Zephaniah (3:16-19): *"Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged! The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty Saviour ... He will ... renew you in His love ... I will save the lame, and assemble the outcasts ... I will bring about their restoration."* (The traditional "Palm Sunday Procession" at Jerusalem began in the fourth century AD when the Bishop of Jerusalem led the procession from the Mount of Olives to the Church of the Ascension). **In the second part of today's Gospel (Lk 22:14—23:56; or 23:1-49)**, we listen to/participate in the Passion of Christ according to Luke. We are challenged to examine our own lives in the light of some of the characters in the story like Peter who denied Jesus, Judas who betrayed Jesus, Pilate who acted against his conscience and condemned Jesus, Herod who ridiculed Jesus, and the leaders of the people who preserved their position by getting rid of Jesus.

Special features of Luke's passion narrative: 1) St. Luke in his Gospel presents Jesus as *'the Savior of mankind.'* So, in his passion narrative too, he stresses that Jesus suffered and died to save mankind. This, then, is not just the tragic story of one man; this is a story of a Savior who is fulfilling a mission. 2) From the outset, St. Luke also establishes Jesus' death as an *'innocent' martyr* who was betrayed, denied, and abandoned by friends, unjustly charged by a frenzied mob, led by threatened religious leaders and abetted by weaselling politicians. Only in St. Luke's narrative does Pilate

pronounce Jesus' innocence three times. Again, only St. Luke has Herod declaring Jesus' innocence. We also notice the centurion's statement, "Surely, this was an innocent man." Even one of the criminals crucified with Jesus attests his innocence, "We are only paying the price for what we've done, but this man has done nothing wrong."³) St. Luke also affirms the fact that *the 'forgiving' power of God* was already at work in Jesus before his death. His enemies humiliate him, strike him, scourge him. Soldiers make a crown with thorns, a crown for the *'King of the Jews,'* Herod mocks him. Through it all there is Jesus and for his part, he does not strike back, he does not scold, he does not accuse or blame. At every turn in this tangled web, in response to every individual and the crowds who caused his suffering and death, Jesus forgives! Most remarkably, Jesus is ready to forgive his executioners, and, on the cross, he forgives those who are putting him to death and promises paradise to one of the criminals who died with him who has asked, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." Another wonder is his capacity in suffering to go out to others: to *'turn towards'* the women of Jerusalem, to acknowledge their grief, and to express his own concern for them. 4) Finally, right from the beginning of his ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth till his death on the cross at Calvary, Jesus is *'Spirit-filled' and he is always in union with God through 'prayer.'* The Lukan Jesus is the rejected prophet, but he is the one who trusts utterly in God. Jesus seems to be the victim, but all through, he is in fact, the master. He is master of the situation because he is master of himself. We notice, St. Luke's depiction of Jesus at prayer on the Mount of Olives lays less stress on his being troubled and sorrowful and more on his union with God. Indeed, his prayer to his Father is answered in the form of an angel sent to strengthen him. This strength saw him through to the end, so that, just before he died Jesus prays, *"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."*

Joke of the Week: 1) Little Johnny was sick on Palm Sunday and stayed home from Church with his mother. His father returned from Church holding a palm branch. The little boy was curious and asked, "Why do you have that palm branch, Dad?" His father explained, "You see, when Jesus came into town, everyone waved palm branches to honor Him; so we got palm branches today." "Aw, shucks," grumbled Little Johnny. "The one Sunday I can't go to Church, and Jesus shows up!"

Additional anecdotes:-01 **"What did the Christians' God do then?"** On Marco Polo's celebrated trip to the Orient, he was taken before the great and fearsome ruler, Genghis Khan. Now what was Marco Polo supposed to do before this mighty pagan conqueror? One false move could cost him his life. He decided to tell the story of Jesus as it is recorded in the Gospels. It is said that when Marco Polo related the events of Holy Week, describing Jesus'

betrayal, His trial, scourging, and crucifixion, Genghis Khan became more and more agitated, more engrossed in the story, and more tense. When Marco Polo pronounced the words, “Then Jesus bowed his head and yielded up His spirit,” Genghis Khan could no longer contain himself. He interrupted, bellowing, “What did the Christians’ God do then? Did He send thousands of angels from Heaven to smite and destroy those who killed his Son?” — What did the Christians’ God do then? He watched His beloved Son die, that’s what the Christians’ God did then. For that was the way God chose for Jesus to ascend the throne of His Kingdom and to establish His Lordship for all time. Not at all the way we would expect God to demonstrate His might and power, but that’s the way it was, and that is how we know what our God is like. In practical terms, that means that this suffering King who rules in love comes to lay His claim on our life. Our entire life is subject to His Lordship, not just a portion of it. To have Christ for our King means that we must rely on Him for everything, most of all the forgiveness of sins.

02) A parade of humility: A pastor was once asked to speak at a banquet for a charitable organization. After the meeting, the program chairman handed the pastor a check. “Oh, I don’t want this,” the pastor said. “I appreciate the honor of being asked to speak. Keep the check and apply it to something special.” The program chairman asked, “Well, do you mind if we put it in our special fund?” “Of course not!” the pastor replied. “Could you please tell me what your special fund is for?” The chairman answered, “It’s so we can get a better speaker for next year.” — Life is full of humbling experiences. But, when we look at Jesus’ parade through the Holy City, we sense that it was an act of humility. He did not choose to ride into the city upon a stallion, but a donkey. He was not coming in the might and power of a conquering king, but as a humble servant.

03) “Sir, I just know I love Jesus.” In a Sociology of Religion class at the University of Virginia, the professor asked the students in the first class to describe their religious background and commitments. One young woman named Barb said she was a Christian. The professor asked, “What tradition of the Christian faith do you identify with? The northern European or English pietism or another?” The student did not understand his question. Finally she said, “Sir, I don’t know exactly what you mean; I just know I love Jesus.” Right there in a classroom, Jesus was declared to be King and perhaps attracted more followers. One of my favourite golfers on the pro tour is Tom Lehman. He often says, “I think of myself as a Christian who plays golf, not as a golfer who is a Christian.” — What about you? Are you first a Christian and then secondarily a banker or a teacher or a salesperson or a Republican or a white person or a husband or a mother? Is the word “Christian” your most important adjective? When you declare, “Jesus is Lord!” have you revealed the

essential you? — This Jesus is still marching down the streets of the world, calling people to decision. Jesus is the unidentified King who has no crown to wear or kingdom to command...until one person at a time declares by Faith, “Jesus is Lord for me. He will reign in my life.”

04) Are you a donkey with a Christian name only, or one carrying Christ? An interesting as well as challenging old fable tells of the colt that carried Jesus on Palm Sunday. The colt thought that the reception was organized to honour him. “I am a unique donkey!” this excited animal might have thought. When he asked his mother if he could walk down the same street alone the next day and be honoured again, his mother said, “*No, you are nothing without Him who was riding you.*” Five days later, the colt saw a huge crowd of people in the street. It was Good Friday, and the soldiers were taking Jesus to Calvary. The colt could not resist the temptation of another royal reception. Ignoring the warning of his mother, he ran to the street, but he had to flee for his life as soldiers chased him and people stoned him. Thus, the colt finally learned the lesson that he was only a poor donkey without Jesus to ride on him. — As we enter Holy Week, today’s readings challenge us to examine our lives to see whether we carry Jesus within us and bear witness to Him through our living or are Christians in name only.