

# Sunday Homily

5 APRIL 2020

YEAR A

## PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

“This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”

Matthew 27:37

### Illustration

On 16th May 1998, some 40,000 people gathered in Birmingham in England to call upon the leaders of the G8 summit to cancel the crippling debts of the world's poorest countries. It was one of the initiatives of the Jubilee 2000 campaign. At a particular time it had been arranged that everyone should hold hands to make a circle round Birmingham and make as much noise as possible for two minutes.

A woman joined in with her whole heart, clasping the hands of those next to her and shouting at the top of her voice. When the two minutes were up, she turned to her neighbour and asked, “Can you tell me what this is all about, please?” She had no idea – she had been in Birmingham shopping that afternoon and just found herself joining in. There must have been others like her in that six-mile circle of protesters.

### Gospel Teaching

There must have been even more like her in the crowds making a lot of noise on that first Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem. People shouting at the tops of their voices, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” Jesus' journey was a significant one because it directly fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy. There had been signs all the time that Jesus was the Messiah, but this was more than a sign. Those who knew their scriptures knew that the king, of David's line, would ride into Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

And so it happened, exactly as the scriptures foretold. And the crowd went wild, following Jesus, following each other, shouting and chanting in praise. But there was confusion too – when they reached the city, people started asking, “Who on earth is this? What's going on?”

We might wonder what was in Jesus' heart as he rode along on the donkey. He knew the shallowness of much of the praise. He understood that many of the people who were proclaiming him king in fact just happened to be there that day, and were caught up in the crowd, like that woman in Birmingham. And he knew that this ride of triumph was in fact a ride towards his death, and that this same crowd who praised him would in a few days' time be shouting for his crucifixion, with just the same ignorance and lack of understanding.

The majesty and triumph of the moment were laced for him with fear and sadness at the pain towards which he was journeying. Perhaps at one level he fervently wished that things could be different, for he was human; and humans usually try to avoid pain, not to walk into it.

But there was no turning back. And even if there had been a way out, Jesus would not have taken it. His mind was set on what was ahead, for he was motivated by love. And while, in this week of all weeks, we need to remember his pain and his suffering, we must not lose sight of the reason for it. When Jesus looked round at all those people shouting his praise, he loved them. Every single one of them. Even the ones who hated him.

Love was the reason why he was willing to walk into the hands of those who despised and misunderstood him so much that they wanted to murder him. Love was the reason why there was no turning back for Jesus.

Everybody failed Jesus; even the ones who loved him the most. His disciples fell away, even denied that they knew him. His family did not understand him. His community disowned him and the authorities killed him. Despite all that, Jesus went on loving. As St Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13, "Love never ends. It bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Because of such love, the people who had failed Jesus were given new beginnings, and hopes that had died would be rekindled.

## **Application**

When Jesus looks around at everyone on this earth, he loves us all, whatever our colour or creed. In all our confusion, in all our weakness and hypocrisy – he loves us. Even as we continue to cause him untold suffering with our selfish pursuit of material wealth, which may even be threatening the planet itself – he loves us.

Let us take hold of Christ's love this week, and let it take root in our hearts, so that as we follow Christ's journey to the cross we may experience his true resurrection when we celebrate Easter.