

## "Two Parades"

St. Mark's - March 25, 2018 - 10:00 a.m.

Rev. Canon Jim Purchase

We all love a parade - the shiny red fire-engines, the marching bands, and decorated floats. Yesterday the "March for our Lives" was held in Washington with over 500,000 people participating. Other Marches were held in many other cities in the US - a 3 Km. long March in Boston. Canadians also held Marches in various cities as well. These Marches were organized by the Youth, demanding better Gun Control Laws to protect citizens. Throughout the Marches the constant theme was heard: "Thoughts and Prayers are not enough".

Palm Sunday will take us from adulation to betrayal and desertion. At the beginning of today's Liturgy, we blessed and carried Palms. In the Gospel Reading we recalled the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and we joined with the crowd "Blessed in the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" Now we have moved into the Sunday of the Passion, and in our 2nd Gospel Reading we hear many of those same people shouting "Crucify him". One of His closest followers will betray Him, another will deny Him, and most of His disciples will abandon Him. The religious leaders will plot with the cynical Roman politicians to kill Him. There is no happy ending in today's Readings.

Mark's timetable for the whole of Holy Week is very precise - the Palm Sunday Liturgy skips chapters 12 & 13 which cover several days of the week until we come to Maundy Thursday and Jesus and His disciples are preparing the Passover meal when Mark says in 14:12: "It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread". But it is what happens between Sunday and Thursday that helps us understand why the Jewish and Roman authorities were so keen to kill Him.

First we need to understand why Jesus chose to enter Jerusalem that day the way He did. YES - it was in fulfilment of prophesy, but it was more than that. It was Rome who loved parades - Rome excelled in using military parades to demonstrate its power and to keep its conquered subjects in line. Jesus knew that Pilate, the Roman Governor, every Passover, on a magnificent horse, and surrounded by a legion of Roman soldiers, would ride from his capitol city on the

Mediterranean and enter the gates of Jerusalem, to make sure that the Jewish peasants stayed in line. In contrast, Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a humble donkey, with people waving palm fronds. It's an anti-government protest - and the people know it - that is why they get so excited - here is the Messiah, the One who is to redeem Israel! Jesus is mocking the empty pomp of the Roman Empire - and its brutality which kept Judea impoverished. Our Palm Sunday Gospel ends with Jesus going into the Temple - but Mark says He only "looked around at everything".

In Mark's sequence of events in Holy Week, he tells us that "On the following day..." that is, Monday, Jesus takes over the temple courtyard - where all the Passover action is taking place - and stages a "teach-in" - "And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying...and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves." And in thinly-veiled Parables (Monday through Wednesday) Jesus denounces the religious leaders - "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and be greeted with respect in the market-places. They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearances say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." Instead of being a place of prayer, the religious leaders had turned it into a "den of robbers" by their cheating, their greediness and insincerity - going through the motions, but not offering worship worthy of God.

It is not Jesus who is being judged this week- it is the politicians, the religious leaders and even us, the people of God.

Jesus comes to us in compassion. Only a few hours after His entry into the Holy City, He wept & said: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" .(Matt. 23:37)

He healed the blind & the lame and despite all the plotting & cruelty. He had compassion on them. Jesus calls us to treat each other with respect and compassion, but we humans continue to fight, belittle, bully and abuse each other.

Jesus comes in judgement. Jesus comes to tell us what we need - not what we want. He tells us that the wages of sin is death, and that one day we will be

called upon to give an account of what we have done in this life. Jesus says: "I was hungry and you gave me no food. I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me. I was sick and in prison and you did not visit me."

Jesus comes to cleanse phony religion. He steps into the Temple and sees all the greed, the commercialism and the cheating. The One who never neglected formal worship, who celebrated all the Feasts, who memorized the Scriptures & learned the Law, showed His dedication by overturning a religion which exploits people. He comes to tear the veil in two which separates people, and a religion that goes through the motions but does nothing to change our lives.

God is judging the U.S. today - refuses to change its gun laws to protect ordinary citizens. God is judging Canada which seems to have a different system of justice based on race & colour.

Make no mistake - this little demonstration we call Palm Sunday was a "political demonstration", and taken together with what happened on Monday in the Temple, it was also a judgement on the Church. And it was a judgement on the fickleness of human beings who found it better to release Barabbas - a known terrorist ready to take to the streets and kill as many Romans and their collaborators as possible - rather than the Messiah who came preaching love, compassion and forgiveness.

But over-riding it all - the message of Palm Sunday and Holy Week is the over-whelming and gracious love of God. Despite our unfaithfulness, our God does not lose faith in us. What happened 2000 years ago shows us that our God was not content to give us good advice and direct things from his heavenly bridge, and He wasn't content simply to send messengers - but He Himself came down and "...emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness...and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross." The God we worship as Christians - was born in a stable at Bethlehem and 33 years later was arrested, put on trial which made a mockery of justice - was beaten, spit upon savagely scourged and eventually nailed to a cross & crucified for no other reason than He "so loved the world" and every human being in it. No other God ever did that. The Passion of Christ is not just a beautiful myth or parable - it actually happened. God has loved, and is loving us, as much as that - and His love has no

ending - no conditions, no reservations: "Having loved his own he loved them to the end".

"The Son of God loves me and gave Himself for me". Can you keep that sentence of St. Paul in Galatians on your lips this week and pray it daily? - while you are washing the dishes, at work, driving the car or watching TV - "God loves me and gave Himself for me."