

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord | For Sunday, April 10, 2022

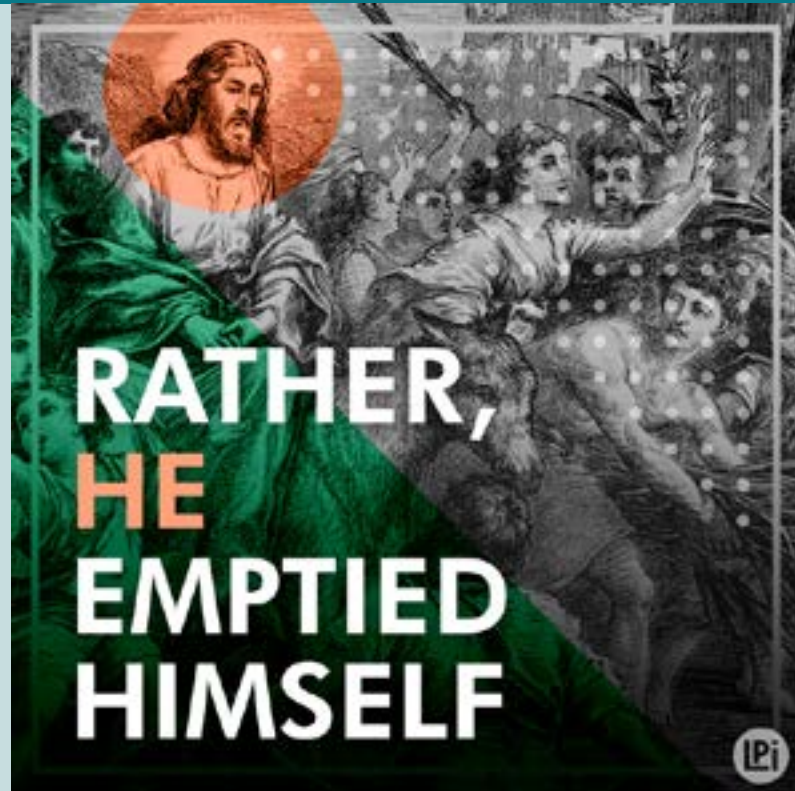
In the Shadow of the Cross

Written by Bro. Silas Henderson, SDS

Isaiah 50:4-7

Philippians 2:6-11

Luke 22:14—23:56



*Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
something to be grasped.*

*Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.*

- Philippians 2:6-8

The blessing and procession with palm branches is easily the element of Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord that most stands out for worshippers. Gathering outside the body of the church (when this is possible), the celebrant reminds us that our works of charity and self-sacrifice during Lent have helped bring us to this moment and to the beginning of the week that we call "holy." And then, we again hear the story of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem and the acclaim of the crowds who accompanied him. The branches we raise are blessed and we, too, accompany Jesus into the holy city adding our own joyful "Hosannas" to those sung out on that first "Palm Sunday."

In her poem "Procession," Janet Schlichting, OP, reflects that a procession — movement from place to place — is "a journey, distilled." But what is the journey that our Palm Sunday procession is recalling? In one sense it is the movement that we, as believers, have experienced in our lives during the Season of Lent, advancing in our own spiritual journey. Beyond this more personal dynamic, however, the movement of our procession is an embodiment of what Pope Francis has called the "two-fold mystery" of this liturgy: "Joyful acclamations at Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, followed by his humiliation. Festive cries, followed by brutal torture ... two characteristic moments of today's celebration: the initial procession with palm branches and the solemn proclamation of the Passion" (Homily, April 14, 2019).

It would be easy to see the triumphal tone of the entrance into Jerusalem — when even the "very stones would cry out" (Luke 19:40) — as a grand conclusion of Jesus' mission. But, as we know, his mission, his journey did not end there. And it is here, in this "distilled journey" with Jesus, that he shows us the way we are to go: the way of humility. As the second reading wonderfully reminds us, Jesus was walking a path that leads from "the form of God" to "the form of a servant," and, in obedience, journeying along a path that led "unto death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8). This is why Pope Francis could also reflect that Jesus "knows that true triumph involves making room for God and that the only way to do that is by *stripping oneself, by self-emptying.*"

Palm Sunday and Holy Week remind us that if we are to truly journey with Jesus, then we must also be willing to give up our own agendas and preferences and give ourselves over to God. The liturgies of these days make real for us that Christianity is not a set of doctrinal statements or an ideology, but a way of life which calls us out of ourselves and confronts our ideas about how the world should be.

In his [Spiritual Diary, Blessed Francis Jordan](#), founder of the Salvatorians, reflected, "The works of God prosper only in the shadow of the cross." This is a beautiful and remarkable image because, while it acknowledges the reality of the cross, with its humiliation, abasement, and death, it also speaks of a light shining behind and beyond the cross, which is not our final destination. The cross and its shadow are there, yes, but looking toward the light beyond we already glimpse the joyful light of the Paschal Mystery which illumines every moment of Holy Week and all of life.

Bro. Silas Henderson, SDS

PRAYER

Almighty, ever-living God,
you have given the human race Jesus Christ our Savior
as a model of humility.
He fulfilled your will
by becoming man and giving his life on the cross.
Help us to bear witness to you
by following his example of suffering
and make us worthy to share his resurrection.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Prayer for "Passion Sunday (Palm Sunday)"
in [Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours](#))