

My dear people of God, Palm Sunday is the great entrance leading into Holy Week, the week when the Lord Jesus makes his way towards the end of his earthly journey. He goes up to Jerusalem in order to **fulfill the Scriptures (...behold your king is coming to you, a just savior is he; humble and riding on a donkey... Zach.9:9)** and to be nailed to the wood of the Cross, the throne from which he will reign forever, drawing to himself humanity of every age and offering to all the gift of redemption. Indeed, this is what John the Baptist meant by calling Jesus, **the Lamb of God**, the one who would take the sins of the world upon Himself and would become the eternal sacrifice to the Father (Jn.1:29). The Lamb of God appears again at the end of the New Testament. With your blood, you purchased, for God, men of every race and tongue, of every people and nation... (Rev.5:9).

In the First Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, we hear about the '**suffering servant of Yahweh.**' It is easy for us, as Christians, to identify this servant with Jesus. When he was made to suffer, despite his innocence, he did not rebel or seek revenge against his enemies. He trusted that God was at his side and knew that he would "**not be put to shame.**"(Is.50:7). On this Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, we honor '*the Suffering Servant*' who laid down his life for us.

The Second Reading from Paul's Letter to the Philippians is a Christological hymn, which 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, except for 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 name**" (Phi.2:6-11). We are called to have the same attitude of humility and obedience as Christ our Lord had.

As we meditate on the Passion of Jesus according to Mark, many events take on new meaning for us. We see a whole host of characters where each had a role to play that eventually led to Jesus' crucifixion, for example Judas, Peter, High Priests, Pontius Pilate... Once we realize that it was our sins that crucified Jesus, we can see these different characters in the Passion representing our sins. Think of Judas, when he met Jesus in Gethsemane, he kissed Jesus (Mk.14:45), but it was a **deceitful and treacherous kiss**. It was not a kiss of love because Judas' heart was far from Jesus. Peter promised that even if all lost faith in Jesus he would not (Mk.14:29.), yet when Peter was in the courtyard of the high priest's house, he denied Jesus three times when he was put under pressure (Mk14:67). We sin, because our faith is weak. Again, out of **envy** the High Priest accused Jesus of many things (Mk.15:3). The last but one character, I wish to talk about is Pontius Pilate, due to **fear** and wanted to **please or satisfy** the crowd, he released Barabbas and handed Jesus over to be crucified (Mk.15:15). While he himself knows that Jesus is innocent "what evil has he done?" (Mk.15:14). On the other hand, the character I like most in the passion narrative is Joseph of Arimathea, who courageously went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus (Mk15:43). Although the disciples had run away, Joseph of Arimathea showed himself to be **an authentic disciple of Christ**. May our meditation on Jesus' Passion this week encourage us to renew our lives with Jesus and leave sin behind to rise with his new life at Easter!

Finally, dear friends, who would have thought that the crowd that welcomed Jesus with such enthusiasm during his entry into Jerusalem would turn against him so quickly within a few days and demand his crucifixion and the release of Barabbas who had been condemned for murder? Their welcome and shouts for Jesus were superficial. Their support for him was only a skin deep. It was easy to be part of a crowd that welcomed Jesus, and it was easy to be part of a crowd that condemned him to death. It is easy to be part of the crowd that receives **rumor as truth!** It is easy to be part of the crowd that allow ourselves to be **deceived and misled!** If we are to be his disciples, he invites us to walk his way, to share his sufferings, to imitate his attitudes, to empty ourselves, to live in service for others – in short, to love others as he loves us. Let us do our best to overcome the love of money, power, wrong decisions, envy, fear and all temptations in order to inherit the Kingdom promised us. Amen!