

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 Christ. 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.

Luke's Gospel established Jesus' death as an **innocent martyr**. Only in Luke's narrative does Pilate pronounce Jesus **innocent three times**. Pilate then addressed the chief priests and the crowds, "I find this man **not guilty**" (Lk.23:4). Again, Pilate said to them, "you brought this man to me and accused him of inciting the people to revolt. I have conducted my investigation in your presence and **have not found this man guilty of the charges you have brought against him...**" (Lk.23:14). Pilate addressed them a third time, "what evil has this man done? **I found him guilty of no capital crime...**" (Lk.23:22). Apart from Pilate declaring Jesus innocent, even one of the criminals crucified with Jesus also testified to Jesus' innocence saying: indeed, we have been condemned for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but **this man has done nothing criminal**" (Lk.23:41). Finally, the centurion who witnessed what had happened glorified God and said, "**this man was innocent beyond doubt**" (Lk.23:47). By condemning Jesus Christ, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and their leaders failed to recognize the Messiah... for even though they found no grounds for a death sentence they asked Pilate to have him put to death.

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!** The question is why should Pilate **condemned an innocent Jesus?** It seems he acted out of fear. Let us be careful not to condemn innocent people. 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, let us love others in as much as they hate 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!