

Palm – Passion Sunday

As Lent draws to a close, we celebrate an uneasy union. Is it “Palm Sunday”, the day of Jesus’ victorious procession into Jerusalem? Or is it Passion Sunday”, the day of his passion and death on the cross?

It is both. “Palm Sunday of the Lord’s Passion”.

The liturgy is a collision of themes: glorious hosannas that give way to somber omens. The two Gospels highlight the contrast.

That’s right, two Gospels. The first is read at the very beginning of the Mass, during the procession of palms. Jesus makes triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, riding on the back of a donkey. The people cheer wildly – “Hosanna!” They lay palm branches before him and even spread their own coats on the road. They treat him like a king!

But just a few minutes later, we hear another Gospel proclamation, one that will challenge our notion of a king.

The second Gospel will be a reading of the passion. In this proclamation, we learn that Jesus the king has been betrayed by one of his own disciples and handed over to the temple guards. Peter, the Rock, who had vowed never to deny Jesus, does so three times. Jesus completes his kingly entry to Jerusalem by receiving a royal robe of mockery and a crown of pain. Finally, Jesus the king is crucified between two common thieves.

Palm/Passion Sunday presents a huge contrast between the world’s view of kingship - and the holy and humble meaning of a king. Jesus enters as a hero and ends as an object of ridicule. The king we hail with Hosannas processes to his coronation, in which he will receive a crown of thorns, and climb to a throne that is the cross.

In this contrast, Jesus shows great humility – taking upon himself the sins of the world. He shows us that real glory and greatness reside in quiet, unrelenting love.

So in these two Gospel passages, we hear a royal entrance to show that Jesus was indeed a king. The passion proclamation shows us what kingship really means. At the heart of all leadership is service, a willingness to offer yourself up for the sake of your people.

The way of the Cross was the true procession of a king.

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