

## REFLECTION ON PALM SUNDAY

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The celebration of Palm Sunday tells us about Jerusalem, on a distant day before the first Full Moon of spring, of that year 33 of the life of Jesus Christ. Let us have a little exercise in mingle with the crowd that this morning filled with exclamations of joy on the streets of Jerusalem.

At first, the group was small and begins to form on the contiguous Mount of Olives, facing Mount Sion where the imposing Herodian Temple of Jerusalem was built. Jesus instructs two of his disciples to go to the village in front – Betfagé – and bring him a trapped little donkey. They did so, they threw their capes over it, and Jesus rode on it. Then *"many extended their capes on the way and other branches of vegetables, which they had cut in the fields. And both those who went ahead, and those who came after, cried out: "Hossana! Blessed What comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom to come, the kingdom of our father David! Hossana in the heights!"* (Mk 11:7-11). And so, exuberant, exultant, the crowd was crowding, gathering and accompanying the Lord who entered the Holy City as a King, the expected Messiah. It's a triumphant, unstoppable and contagious entrance.

But this is also the Sunday of the Passion, because since the year 440 – since the time of Pope St. Leo the Great – the Passion of Jesus has been read in the Gospel; Palm Sunday unites in a whole the real triumph of Christ and the proclamation of passion.

Benedict XVI explains his book "Jesus of Nazareth: From the entrance to Jerusalem to the Resurrection" that Jesus Christ claimed the royal right, known throughout antiquity, of the request for particular means of transport. The use of an animal (the donkey) on which no one had ridden is yet another indicator of the royal right. Jesus wanted his way and his actions to be understood on the basis of the promises of the Old Testament (Zac 9:9) which came true in him; Jesus does not lean on violence, he does not begin a military uprising against Rome. "Its power is of a different character; it is in God's poverty, in God's peace that He individualizes the only saving power," the book explains. Jesus' companions shout words from Psalm 118 and on his lips become a messianic proclamation. This multitude that applauded the arrival of Jesus is not the same one that demanded his crucifixion, as Benedict XVI writes in the book mentioned above: the three Sinoptic Gospels, as well as that of St. John, clearly show that those who applauded Jesus at his entrance into Jerusalem were not its inhabitants, but the multitudes who accompanied Jesus and entered the Holy City with him.

This point is much clearer in Matthew's account: *"And entering Jerusalem, the whole city stirred up and said, 'Who is this?'. To this, the multitudes answered, 'This is the prophet Jesus, that*

*of Nazareth of Galilee"* (Mt 21:10-11). Therefore, the multitudes that acclaimed him were not the same ones who cried before Pilate a few days later that they would release Barabbas and kill Jesus; It's good to take that into account.

In this Sunday's liturgy, the reading of the Passion of Jesus (in year B) really emerges in its extension, according to St Mark. In the two Readings and in the Responsorial Psalm, which are read every year, the figure of the "Servant of God" appears. In the second reading, this Servant presented by Isaiah "to bring words of encouragement to those who are downcast" has a face and a name: Jesus Christ. The first words of Psalm 21 – chorus – are from Christ's last words on the Cross: "My God, my God you have forsaken me", mean lamentation and trust.

In the account of the passion in St Mark, we admire a Jesus who remains silent, abandoned by all, in close union with the Father whom he calls "abbá", (who in Aramaic, i.e. Father ) and who leads to an impressive proclamation of faith by a pagan, the Roman centurion: "*Truly this man is the Son of God*". St Mark begins his Gospel with this statement and although always silenced throughout the text ("Jesus did not want anyone *to know it*") it is with her that concludes; this is the process or itinerary of faith: the believer must go on walking and discovering for himself that Jesus is the Son of God.

There are two unique peculiarities in this Gospel that do not exist in the texts of the other evangelists:

- + the term "Abbá" placed in the mouth of Jesus precisely at the most dramatic moment of his life, and which reveals a supreme surrender and trust in the hands of the Father;

- + and the episode of the young man wrapped only in a sheet, which when trying to arrest fled completely naked (Mk 14:51-52). It probably would have been Mark himself. He reminds us that the disciple must abandon everything, throw away the cloak as the blind man of Jericho and follow the Master; yet even the generous disciple sometimes abandons and flees. In fact, being able to give life requires the disciple a long journey illuminated by Christ's Passover.

In conclusion, I am pleased to write the following: If we wanted to join the group of those who took branches and acclaimed Jesus, if throughout our lives we have often abandoned him, afraid, consciously or unconsciously, if by far we witness the scene of the crucifixion and death of Jesus, let us make the act of faith of the centurion, "*truly this is the Son of God*", our purpose of life to follow Jesus – following the example of the apostles and disciples who left everything to live and die for him and for the cause of the Kingdom of God, of the salvation of the world.

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