

# Palm (Passion) Sunday

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When I was a kid, Holy Week was always busy. There was planning for the big meal next Sunday. Would it be ham with lasagna or ravioli? Some years, I'd have a new suit –from 'Robert Hall.' And maybe even a new pair of Hushpuppies from Tom McCann. My sister-in-law, Sue, would be cleaning her house for family. There were eggs to dye and chocolate to look forward to.

For a lot of us, it can still be a time for planning.

But before we get too caught up in next Sunday, we need this Sunday. We need to remember. Remember that...

...the same crowd that cheered Jesus also condemned him.

...the voices praising him also called for his death.

...those who loved him and promised loyalty also abandoned him, denied him, and betrayed him.

And if you want to know who did that, just look at the palm branches in our hands. We are guilty.

**While we may not want to admit it, Christ's Passion goes on today.** Our betrayal of him continues, in ways large and small.

How often do we shrug Jesus off when things become too difficult or the rules too hard or the demands of the Christian life too taxing?

How often do we treat love as just a sentiment for greeting cards, and not a command for living?

How often do we see suffering in the faces of those in need, and simply turn away?

Jesus continues to bleed and cry out, "Why have you abandoned me?" And he cries out to us today. Whatever you do to the least of these, he said, you do to me.

**What do we do?** We encounter him on the bus, step over him on the sidewalk, and go out of our way to avoid him when we feel like he might make demands on our time.

At the office, we make jokes at his expense, or spread gossip about him at the water cooler. We suck up to people who are more popular, or attractive, or influential at work – and barely give the unimportant person who answers the phone the time of day.

Whether we realize it or not, we see Jesus every day, read about him in the papers, hear about him in the news. He is everywhere there is someone who is small, or neglected, or disrespected, or discarded.

He is with the unwanted and unloved, the bullied and abused.

*“Why have you abandoned me?”*

**Do we hear him?** We find ways to justify our choices. But it can't be denied. Whenever we choose death over life, sin over the gospel, popularity over integrity, indifference or disdain over love – in short, whenever we have turned away from Jesus – we who claim to believe in him have, instead, betrayed him.

We have said, “Give us Barabbas.” We have said, in effect, “Crucify him.”

And we have done it with palms in our hands and the echoes of “Hosanna” in the air. We need to remember that.

We need these palms as a reminder – and a challenge. They remind us that we are called to be heralds of the Gospel...heralds of Christ – to celebrate him the way they did that day in Jerusalem.

These palms challenge us to keep crying “Hosanna,” to keep proclaiming the Good News – even when the world tempts us to do otherwise, even when it seems like it would be easier to go with the crowd and simply choose Barabbas.

They challenge us to *not* turn our back and walk away. They challenge us to *not* step over Jesus, or ignore him. And they challenge us not only to remember what we have done to him, but what he has done for us. That is what this week is about.

So, before we look ahead to next Sunday, and the big plans and the big meal, look back, and look within....and look to these palms. Look at what we are called to do...and who we are called to be.

Holy Week begins as it ends, in triumph, to remind us that suffering is a journey with a goal, not a winding road that leads nowhere. The end of the journey is resurrection, a new kind of existence.

The way to that new life is through the cross and tomb. It's the road Jesus traveled. And he accompanies us along the way today - and every day of our lives.

*Remember these phrases from the gospel...  
I say to you, one of you will betray me...  
Surely, it is not I, Lord?*

*Take and eat: this is my body...  
Drink, all of you: this is my blood...*

*You will deny me three times...*

*You could not keep watch with me for one hour?*

*The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak...*

*Father, your will, not mine, be done...*

*I do not know the man! A cock crowed...  
Peter went out and wept...*

*Crucify him!*

*So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd...*

*They spat on him...*

*My God, why have you abandoned me?*

*Truly, this man was the Son of God!*

Do any of these words, these phrases, these images conjure up good food for prayer and reflection for us for this coming week?

Which of these words finds a home in our hearts? A home in our prayers?

Christians around the world pause to remember and celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ during Holy Week.

May the story of his suffering and death refresh our faith in his love poured out for us. And may the words of Jesus' passion, embedded in our hearts, bring us to the peace and joy of Easter.

Deacon Greg Cecere

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(with excerpts from Deacon Rick Fisher)