

PALM SUNDAY (2009)

Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC

St. Peter's Church in Volo

5 April 2009

Today, is the great memorial of Our Lord's entrance into the Holy City of Jerusalem, where He had come to suffer and die. This day was the first time during His life on earth that Jesus allowed the people to pay Him royal homage. And because of this, it is rightfully a feast in honor of Christ the King. Therefore, the palms that we carry today are not just an act of remembrance of that first Palm Sunday because just as the people lined the road on that day waving their branches to greet their Messiah King, we hold them today as an act of royal homage to Christ our King, publicly professing that Christ is the King of Kings, the King far above all other kings of this world.

We read in the gospel account of this day that the crowds joyfully welcomed their king shouting: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest!" But although the mood seems jubilant, we all know that this royal procession wasn't destined for a throne in a palace. Instead, it was a procession to the suffering throne of Calvary. It was the gateway to Holy Week.

Palm Sunday, therefore always brings us face to face with suffering. Instead of a majestic king in splendid robes, we have a Suffering Servant, who enters His royal city not on a golden chariot, but in the common dress of a carpenter on a humble beast of burden. That day, the ass carried Him amidst cries of jubilation. Five days later, when some of the same people would cry, "Crucify him!" the Savior would become, shall we say, a "beast of burden" Himself, bearing in the Cross all of us and our sins, carrying that unimaginable weight through the city to His throne room on Calvary. He was a king, dressed not in the robes of royal scarlet but in the crimson of His own blood.

Today, Christ enters the Holy City in triumph as the King of Martyrs. We should carry our palms today as soldiers in service to our King as He leads us into the battlefield to wage war with all of the forces of hell, which in our day have been unleashed upon us with all their fury. But we are also all called to imitate Him, therefore, it is the day when we should all consecrate ourselves to Him as potential martyrs in a world which hates us as much as it hated Him. In the sacred art of the Church martyrs were always portrayed with palm branches in their hands. So, holding our palm branches, we should acclaim that we too are ready to be martyrs alongside Christ. Like the early Church when the Christian community accompanied someone condemned to death for the faith, holding the palm branches of martyrdom in their hands, we accompany our Christ, who was condemned to death, so that we could have faith.

Because of our sins, He who had no sin died the death of a sinner, so for His sake we must do all we can to cease to sin. Just as Christ sacrificed Himself for us, so that we could share heaven with Him, so too "we must sacrifice ourselves to God, each day and in everything we do, accepting all that happens to us for the sake of the Word, imitating His passion by our sufferings, and honoring His blood by shedding our own. We must be ready to be crucified."^a

Just like Simon of Cyrene, take up your cross daily and follow Christ. Perhaps, you are undergoing some great trial in your life that seems too heavy to bear. You may

want to be angry that God has allowed this to happen to you, but deep down you know that suffering is something that no one in this life can escape. Instead, acknowledge Him as your God just as the good thief, who received the promise of paradise from the very mouth of Christ. Crucified then at the side of your Savior as the good thief was, He will promise you the same if you remain faithful to Him—the promise of paradise.

“Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God ... rather He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave. ... He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death” and “because of this, God greatly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name.”^b

This He has also destined for all those, who pick up their crosses and follow Him faithfully and obediently. As He did, we need to empty ourselves of self-centered love. We need to humble ourselves by emptying ourselves of pride and self-righteousness. We need to be obedient to the point of our death, imitating our Savior in all things. We live in a new age of martyrs and should always be ready to sacrifice ourselves for Him, who sacrificed Himself for us.

^a Gregory Nazianzen, *Oratio* 45, 23-24: PG 36, 654-655. Taken from the Second Reading of the Office of Matins for Palm Sunday.

^b Phillipians 2:6-9