

Palm Sunday
24.03.24
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And so, we begin the most solemn week of the liturgical year. Once called the 'Great Week', nowadays we know it as 'Holy Week'. In it we witness the total self-giving of Jesus. St Paul describes it as his "kenosis" or 'self-emptying' by which Jesus made himself entirely receptive to the divine will. "He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave." Paul goes on to affirm the total vindication of Jesus: "God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name."

There may be some who wonder why we Christians bother with obscure rituals like blessing palms and bits of branches broken off from trees, and then processing together waving our branches as we enter the nave and sanctuary of our churches. But ritual has power and ritual has meaning.

Our Palm procession signifies both our taking possession of our church for the sacred ceremonies that will be celebrated here during the week ahead and the fact that like Our Lord, on that first Palm Sunday, we too are on a journey. A journey from life - to death - to life. A theme I will come back to on Holy Thursday.

Our liturgy this week invites us to follow Jesus every step of the way, beginning with his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. There he was welcomed, applauded and acclaimed by a crowd of well-wishers. On Thursday we will join him at table, to receive his gift of himself in the eucharistic bread and wine. After dining with him we will, in our reflections, go with him along the trail from the Upper Room to the Garden of Olives. There we will see him struggling with fear and anxiety about the cruel death that awaits him. On Good Friday we will be standing in spirit beside his mother at the foot of the cross, while he hands his spirit back to the Father who sent him.

On Saturday we will be quiet and silent around his tomb, as we remember the injustice and cruelty of humanity, for which he died. Then, late on Saturday, we will move from the darkness of our Passion journey to the place of the bright Easter fire. There we will join the procession of the great Paschal Candle, representing the risen Christ, as he lights up the darkness of our church and our lives.

The pain of our compassion with Jesus on the journey to Calvary will give way to the hope and joy of Easter. Jesus Christ is not dead and gone. No, he is risen, strong and powerful, alive in himself, and alive in us. Then we can hold in our hearts those assuring words that Juliana of Norwich heard in her vision of Christ Crucified. From his own lips she heard this promise: 'All will be well, all will be well, all manner of things will be well.'

Let the journey begin!