

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ
Amen.

Our sermon text today is written in Matthew 21:1-11

Let us pray ...

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in
Your sight; we pray through Your son, Jesus Christ.

The Saving Passion

In the last 50 years or so, there has been a great change in the way many Christians have viewed the life of Jesus. In a time gone by, it was always seen that the suffering and the death of Jesus was central. Around 300 years ago, the great composer, Johann Sebastian Bach, wrote two masterpieces: St Matthew's Passion and St John's Passion. In these works the history of Jesus' suffering and death are set to music, interspersed with poetry and hymns. To perform St Matthew's Passion takes close to 3 hours. But in this you can see what care and what effort was taken to focus on the suffering of Christ.

Likewise, in our hymnal, the largest collection of hymns is in the "Passion" section, and they are also the longest hymns.

But now, we are living in a time where many Christians could go to church for a whole year and almost never hear a single word about the suffering and death Jesus. Some people might even say that, "people used to focus on the suffering of Jesus, now we focus on the resurrection." But this isn't genuine. You can't play these things against each other. Because that's not what Easter is about.

It encourages people think that Good Friday is the day where we feign some kind of an austerity and sombreness, but then Easter Sunday is the day when we can forget about all that, kick off our shoes, mess around and be silly. This is not what Jesus' life is about.

What has really happened in the church is that many Christians have forgotten that Jesus is our Saviour, our Redeemer, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Instead, they want to dress him up in some hippy flared trousers, and an open neck avocado and orange coloured shirt, and have him have a beer at the bar with us as just another friend! They want to make Jesus one of the blokes, one of the guys, one of our mates.

But Christianity is a serious matter—sure, there is time for humour, and laughter, and enjoyment. But we also need to think about the real issues of our soul and of our life, that require a seriousness of purpose that is often not valued in our country. What we need to have in our church is a renewal that revolves around the suffering and death of Jesus, of Him crucified. After all this is what St Paul said about his preaching, when he said: *We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.*

Today is Palm Sunday, the day on which we celebrate Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and yet it is also the day we hear of His suffering and death. For many modern Christians, the readings for today might appear to be opposing each other, just as Good Friday might seem to stand opposed to Easter Sunday. By this I mean that on the one hand we hear of Jesus entering the city of Jerusalem, where He receives a king's welcome, and then on the other hand we hear of His utter rejection, which starts with an unjust trial that ultimately leads to His suffering and death.

But the thing is, just as you cannot separate the days of Easter, so too, we cannot separate these two events; because in both of these the words of the prophets of Israel and even the words of the Palm Sunday crowd are being fulfilled. Because this Palm Sunday hero, Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah has come to Jerusalem to die.

As we heard in the reading this morning, *The crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"* (Mt 21:9).

The word hosanna, which in the Hebrew means 'Please save' (Psalm 118:25), was originally an appeal for deliverance, and came in to liturgical use to serve as an expression of joy and praise for deliverance granted or anticipated. It goes to say then that those people who were shouting "*Hosanna*" that day recognised Jesus as God's anointed one from the house of David of whom the prophets had spoken, and through whom they hoped that all their messianic expectations would be fulfilled.

These are bold words, having something akin to the sound of a command to them. Even so they are exactly the kind of words our Lord had in mind when He said "*Ask and it will be given to you.*" (Matt 7:7) because even though they are imperative, they acknowledge a need the people cannot fill for themselves and are simply a recognition of who God is and what He has come to do. In other words, they are words of faith.

Having said this, this is one of those good news/bad news things for the crowds that day in Jerusalem. The good news being that they are right. Jesus is indeed the great Messiah, the Saviour sent by God to deliver his people. But the bad news is that the people misunderstood and underestimate just what this meant.

The expectations and faith behind their hosannas falls far short of the intentions and faithfulness of the One riding on that donkey that day. This was not just the next bloke in a long line of Judges, and kings, the next super hero of Israel coming to restore the nation, to over throw the Roman imperialists, and who would restore Israel to her glory days of peace and prosperity as the region's super power.

We see the same thing among us today, don't we? We'd be happy with a religion that would validate us as His chosen people, that affirms us, and makes us feel comfortable and good about ourselves. Surely we would gladly welcome a king who could restore the moral fibre of our country, who would make the church great again, who would relieve us of pestilence, and put an end to abortion and poverty; a king who would protect us from from all evil. A king who would give us what we want because he is the king who would have a beer at the bar with us, you know just like one of the guys. Now that is the kind of a king who would get lots of hosannas from us, isn't it?

But that does not even come close to what this Messiah - this one whose very name, Jesus, that means I Am saving - has come to do. Thankfully He lives up to His name:

- from before the very foundations of the earth - the Son of God is saving.
- through the people of Israel - the Son of God is saving.
- from the cross on Calvary - the Son of God is saving.

But never in a very pretty way or one which is well received because that saving is always connected to His suffering, His passion. As we see on this Palm Sunday - He came to die. The entry into Jerusalem is ultimately for the same reason as His entry into this world of human flesh that we celebrate at Christmas - to suffer, to die on a cross, to be buried and to be resurrected from the grave for us.

That is still true for today as well. Because Jesus name still means "I Am Saving," that is what He does when he comes among us as the Holy Spirit gathers us together in His holy Christian Church. And when He comes, He comes to bring us His Passion, because He came to die. Now, when He comes to us in the preaching of the Word and His holy Sacraments, He comes to make us part of His Passion, burying us into His death in Holy Baptism and having us participate in the resurrection of His once crucified flesh in Holy Communion.

Yes, now Jesus, the One who is Saving, does it as our ascended Lord from the right hand of the Father, judging the living and the dead by means of His Word and Sacrament. I Am, Saving sinners whom He judges to be righteous as they are covered in His forgiveness by the work of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, the preaching of the Word, and the giving of Absolution, and the Lord's Supper. I Am, He who came to die, has died and risen and is saving the righteous from themselves by the preaching of His holy Law that judges them to be sinners, utterly dead, completely condemned, and in desperate need of His deliverance.

Yes, Jesus is the Alpha and Omega of Saviours. He is the I Am who came to die and is always Saving from the beginning of the world to the end.

And you are among those He is saving now. So with the triumphant crowd of palm branch wavers, we too cry Hosanna! Save us now. For it is the cry of the faithful, pleading to the Lord to do what He has always promised to do.

And God, the great I Am, who is the same yesterday, today, and forevermore saves you the only way He has ever saved anyone; by forgiving you all of your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen