

**Homily for Palm Sunday  
March 29, 2015**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
Springfield, Illinois**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: everyone loves a hero. We love to celebrate their triumphs. Our sporting heroes receive public recognition, parades and awards, and we bask in the reflected glory that shines on us as their fans. Such glory, however, is short-lived. An athlete reaches his or her peak and enjoys the top spot for only a short time. Other heroes in public life soon lose their popularity as their ratings drop. People are very quick to drop their allegiance to a loser; they always want to be on the winning side.

Jesus was very careful not to present himself as a popular hero. At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, part of the devil's temptations had been precisely this - to be the Messiah of the people's expectations, a wonderworker, a political revolutionary. The mission of Jesus was, however, to do the will of his Father. It was fidelity to the will of God that

led Jesus ultimately to the events that we celebrate during this coming week.

With our celebration today of Palm Sunday, we have crossed through the doorway that leads into Holy Week, this most important week of the liturgical year, for it is the week of our salvation. From the moment that our first parents disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, the Lord had been at work preparing for that moment when He would restore humanity's broken relationship with Him, a restoration that would come about in the most unlikely of ways. It is the culmination of that plan that we re-live each year during our observance of Holy Week.

Our entrance into Holy Week began with a joyful note as we gathered together to commemorate the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, an entry that was marked by elated acclamations of Him as the long-awaited Messiah as the people cried out: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord...Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 11:9-10).

Having heard these words, we became participants in that very scene as we joined the solemn procession into the church, joyfully following Christ our King in His triumphal march. As the liturgy moved on, the tone

began to change to one of sorrow as we were led into reflecting on the Passion that our Lord underwent after having arrived in Jerusalem. Many of the voices that, upon His entry into the city, had shouted triumphantly: "Hosanna", would now cry out with contempt: "Crucify him...Crucify him!" (Mark 15:13,14).

In 2012, during his final Palm Sunday Homily, Pope Benedict XVI reflected on the fact that the people's reaction to Jesus was due in part to the fact that He did not live up to their expectations of what they thought the Messiah should be. The Holy Father said that "The majority, in fact, was disappointed by the way Jesus chose to present himself as Messiah and King of Israel... who chooses the Cross as his throne."<sup>1</sup>

As we grasp our palms today, we are each invited to enter into the crowd on the day of His entry into the city and to reflect on the King whom we are being invited to follow not just today, but every day of our lives. He desires that we accept His reign into our hearts. To do so requires that we let Him reign not according to our expectations and our terms, but according to His.

This means that we have to look at our lives and identify those areas of selfishness that we are still holding on to, hesitant or even fearful to let

go of them, in submitting ourselves to His will. Letting go of those things, whether it be a habitual sin, a fear of confronting a difficult situation, or accepting the sufferings that are ours to bear – all of these can be extremely difficult. We are confronted with the reality that to be a true follower of Christ demands a daily struggle. Such a path is far from attractive in the eyes of the world, and as a result of this, many choose the path of less resistance and choose to follow Christ only from a distance, where the expectations are far less demanding and little is expected from us with regards to letting go of our worldly attachments.

Reflecting on the Passion of Christ, seeing how He did not flee from the suffering that He was to face, we are reminded that the only true path that leads to victory is by way of the Cross. He has trodden that path successfully, and in His victory, He promises to give us the strength that we likewise need to struggle in following Him in order to share in the victory that is guaranteed to those who persevere in remaining faithful in that journey.

Christ never wavered on His path because He knew of His Father's protection for Him and the prize that lay ahead for Him beyond the Cross. Although the life of a disciple who follows Christ on the Way of the Cross

may indeed be difficult, we must not be overwhelmed by the shadow of the Cross. We must constantly be reminded of the loving care that our Heavenly Father has for us at all times and believe with great faith that “the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us” (Romans 8:18).

As we continue our journey through Holy Week, let us renew our commitment to remain close to Christ and to let Him reign in an ever greater way in our lives, letting go of what holds us back from letting Him be the “king and center of our hearts.” As we proclaim the “mystery of faith” and “do this in memory” of Jesus, our Mass is the culmination of the new covenant: God will be faithful to us, and we proclaim our faithfulness to Him. We can be confident that if we heed His call to die to ourselves in this life, we have the sure and certain hope that we will live with Him where He reigns victorious in the glory of Heaven.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily for Palm Sunday, 1 April 2012.