

Column040223

Companions on the Journey

April 2, 2023

Dear Friends in Christ,

Today is known as Palm Sunday and in Catholic churches the world over those who attend and participate in celebrations of the Eucharist will be given some palm as part of the celebration. The palm will be blessed during the ceremonies at Mass and then will be carried home. Usually it is displayed alongside other religious items such as crucifixes or pictures of the Blessed Mother or certain saints or various scenes from the life and ministry of Jesus.

On that original Palm Sunday there were tens of thousands of visitors to Jerusalem that year and many of them were convinced that Jesus truly was the Messiah for whom he came as the great liberator. Instead of entering as the great general and conquerors entered—in chariots or on the mount of a great steed, Jesus rides humbly on the back of an ass. But make no mistake about it, his entry was a definitive statement to the religious powers that be, that he was the Messiah. Because the prophet Zephaniah had prophesied that this is precisely how the Messiah would come and enter into Jerusalem.

There was almost a certain frenzy on the part of the people. Imagine! The Messiah was coming! They had heard the stories. They had seen the miracles. That blind man who was cured, “I knew his brother’s cousin, he was from my home town.” “I remember that man who was paralyzed by the pool in Siloam. Then he could walk.” “Do you remember Jairus and his little girl? She died and Jesus brought her back to life.” “And what about his friend Lazarus? He was in the tomb for several days and Jesus called him to come out—and he did! “

“I was in the crowd the day he fed the five thousand people with a couple of loaves of bread.” “He was always so gentle with people. He even forgave great sinners. Remember Zacchaeus the tax collector in Jericho? He forgave him. He must be the messiah.” “I wonder what he will do with the High Priest Caiaphas? He is so corrupt. He and all his cronies. They don’t really care about us. It’s all about the power and the coin. Keep things moving!” “And those hated Romans. Will he defeat their armies? But he doesn’t have an army. I’ll bet a lot of people would follow him though.” “Would they fight for him?” “They would if he fed them and their families.” “He could do it.” That was that original Palm Sunday. Things were left unresolved but clearly all of Jerusalem was abuzz with the news about Jesus of Nazareth.

Then Friday morning came. He had already been captured, delivered to the High Priest, taken before Pilate and scourged. Now he was being forced to trade places with the notorious Barabbas. Suddenly, there is this very same man, now bloodied and beaten, forced to carry his cross to Golgatha. Only one thing happens on that hill. They hang people there. On trees. With nails. Until they die of exhaustion and loss of blood. How could things go from Sunday to Friday like that? How could that happen? How indeed? But happen it did. Remember: He prophesied that it would. Nobody believed him then. No one took that seriously. Until now. Yes. Until now.

In Christ’s peace,

Msgr. McHenry