

Palm Sunday- EF 2014
Deacon Pat Hall

*Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday Gospel at **MATTHEW 21:1-11**.*

Do you feel the excitement? The folks in Jerusalem were excited. They were hopeful. He could be the messiah. That word doesn't have the impact on me today that it must have had on them back then. I first learned the word "messiah" long after I had been taught about Jesus. "Messiah" was just another word for him like "Lamb of God" or "Prince of Peace". It just described something historical about Jesus and his time. I've found that something "historical" often produces more yawns than excitement.

But to these Jews laying their cloaks and palm branches in Jesus' path, this wasn't something historical. He was the fulfillment of their dreams, their hopes and desires. They called him the Son of David. He is treated to a king's reception. They cried out "Hosanna" meaning "please, save."ⁱ They had hopes of liberation from oppression, poverty and disease.

And yet we know that this procession is just the beginning of a journey that leads to Calvary. Jesus knew. He had predicted it. His disciples never quite got that. They just couldn't conceive of the possibility, despite Jesus' explicit prophecy. His prediction on where to find and secure the ass and the colt should have given his disciples some confidence in his prophetic vision.

And the manner of his entrance fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah (9:9): "Behold thy king cometh to thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass..." This king embodied gentleness and humility, not power and position. This also should have given the people a clue as to who Jesus really is. But on that day, Jesus was beheld through the eye of the beholder. He was what everyone thought he could be, should be, from what each person thought he or she needed and wanted.

This is nothing new in life. It is quite the normal human reaction. When I was in law enforcement I was "invited" often to many scenes of conflict. It could be a domestic problem, a neighbor complaint or even a dog dispute. I'd show up and everyone wanted me to be the one who would enforce what each clearly saw as the righteous side of the matter, their side. I came with a different agenda. My concern was what the law said and how best to restore the peace. Often, "peace" was not on anyone else's agenda.

I also noticed how some put their own expectations on others during this past year of our Holy Father's pontificate. I read one author who wrote that Pope Francis favored traditional liturgy in the Mass. I read another who thought the Pope was headed towards break-through reforms in our teachings about divorce. The only

thing **I** found is that these postulations have more to do with the authors' hopes than what I've seen explicitly from the Pope. Whatever Pope Francis is, he is not shy. He will tell us in good time what he thinks or teaches about this or that. How about we give him the time to share that with us?

Which brings us back to Jesus' procession into Jerusalem. While all the Gospels record this as an event in real time, its ultimate meaning is in how it reveals the presence of a loving God, the one who comes to save his children.

As we process into Holy Week, feel free to cry "Hosanna", to lay your needs and fears at the feet of the blessed one who comes in the name of the Lord. But I need to remember to not define Jesus to fit my own needs and wants. Let us open our minds and our hearts to Jesus as **he** reveals himself to us. We find his revelation in Scripture. If I want to find Jesus, I need to start with my Bible; it will show the way.

Yet, it is I who needs to move towards Jesus, the one who is constantly coming to me. It is up to me to accept Jesus' offer of friendship, a personal relationship. And may my relationship to Jesus define my relationship with all of his brothers and sisters, our brothers and sisters. I hope to practice that enough, with God's grace, so that when I go before that judgment seat, Jesus and I will recognize each other as old friends.

Today, let us be joyful as Jesus comes to us as our meek and humble savior even as we anticipate the ache we will experience this week, an ache we would have for any intimate friend's suffering, all the time knowing that his Sunday victory not only spelled the end of his death, but that of ours as well.

ⁱ Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *the Gospel of Matthew, Sacra Pagina*, p. 294