

Today we mark the beginning of holy week with Christ's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Throughout the week to come, we take those final steps with Jesus to the cross. We share a final and continual meal with Him, we mourn for Him with the deepest sorrow, we wait patiently through holy Saturday, and then we rise with Him in glory on Easter Sunday. This is a difficult week in the life of Christians because it is such an emotional roller coaster. Add to this the irony with which we are continually confronted during this week, and soon we are emotionally overwhelmed.

Holy Week is full of images and thoughts and experiences that have shaped the Christian conscience for millennia. This is why your participation in this week's activities, particularly in the Triduum, the Three Days, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, and then in Easter Sunday, is required by the Church.

Allow me here, to talk briefly about this last statement. Now the typical modern Christian may very likely bristle at the suggestion that I say participation is required. Often they will respond with umbrage saying things like, "So you mean that I am not saved if I do not participate? Who are you to tell me that I have to do this or that to be saved?! Sounds like a works-based religion to me. I don't answer to you, I answer to Jesus!"

Such indignation, however, reveals a very small view of "salvation". First, it views salvation as a sort of one and done thing. I said the sinner's prayer and/or I've been baptized and now I've got my membership card. I'm good to go. It doesn't see, however, that salvation is also a process. It is a journey taken by all of us together. Yes, it has a definite beginning, but we never get to a point where we are good enough so that we can just cruise on over the finish line. Each day brings new challenges that demand us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus. And each year the story of our redemption, and the dear price that was paid for us, is rehearsed to our soul's health.

Second, such a response reveals the perspective that salvation is just a private matter, an internal matter, that is beyond accountability to any priest or pastor or bishop or church for that matter. At the least, it shows a distrust, and at the worst it shows even a contempt, of the spiritual authorities that God has established. Such an attitude puts Jesus in a box. Instead of being called to submit to God to be conformed to His Image, an internalized, privatized, “faith” means that we accept Jesus on our own terms. We make Him in our image.

In response to this, let me first be clear that when I say that participation in Holy Week is required, I am not condemning anyone for not participating. I am saying that the Church has made this journey together throughout its history because it shapes our imaginations in Christ-likeness, in holiness. It helps us to have our minds and hearts transformed, renewed, refreshed to draw us into an ever deeper love of Jesus. I am simply saying that it is for your spiritual benefit, and for the benefit of the whole Church, that you enter fully into the historical events and into the deep spiritual mysteries revealed in all of the events of this week - the Triumphal Entry, the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Church is our nurturing mother, guiding us and tending to us throughout our sojourn in this world. Do not despise what Christ has established for you for your well-being and wholeness.

Of course today, we focus upon the Triumphal Entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem for the final time during His first advent. The week begins when Christ enters the city to shouts of acclamation and praise, “Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord;” Christ was acclaimed as the King, the Messiah The Son of David who would rule in the authority of David. Once He arrived in the city, His first stop was the temple where He threw out the money grubbing merchants and traders. “My Father’s house shall be called an house of

prayer, but you all have made it a den of thieves. Be gone!" So far, so good. This is how a righteous king should act!

But from that point on, it seems as if things didn't go so well. His support from the people vanishes. One of His close disciples betrays Him. It is downhill all the way to the cross. Jesus doesn't appear to be that great of a king after all. The "plan" has fallen apart. Here is one of those supremely ironic events of this week. It is natural for us to look at how it all played out and think that the Triumphal Entry was a misstep, that the people got it wrong because Christ's reign doesn't begin here. We think to ourselves, that Christ's reign is for the next world, that it is just a spiritual reign.

Or is it? Here, I believe, we are guilty of interpreting these events with an earthly perspective so this looks like a failed political revolution to us. The irony is that this really is Christ's victory. Far from loss after loss and failure after failure, the sufferings of Christ on the way to the cross are merely one victorious battle after another through which Christ wins the world. The Cross is the Throne of Christ from which he reigns, for on it, God's blood is poured out into the world and thus begins the redemption of all things. Christ humbles Himself with intentionality knowing that His suffering is required for His glory. In our epistle, we read that He,

made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In that passage, notice that Jesus is the subject who is acting in the pursuit of humility. Christ made himself of no reputation. He humbled himself and became obedient. Christ chose this path because it was the only way to victory and glory. In the cross, we only see obvious defeat, but may God grant us the grace to understand that the Cross is the very Victory of Christ. Our wisdom falls short when approaching the events of Holy Week, for it looks like the plan went sideways. But our wisdom is faulty. Instead, let us keep our eyes on Christ. Watch Him throughout the week. He doesn't exude desperation, but rather He orchestrates everything that happens, knowing exactly what it will cost Him. He gives everything so that He will gain everything.

Our closing hymn this morning will be, Ride On, Ride On in Majesty, #105. I encourage you to pay close attention to its lyrics.

1 Ride on, ride on in majesty!  
Hear all the tribes hosanna cry;  
O Savior meek, pursue Your road  
with palms and scattered garments strowed.

2 Ride on, ride on in majesty!  
In lowly pomp ride on to die.  
O Christ, Your triumphs now begin  
o'er captive death and conquered sin.

3 Ride on, ride on in majesty!  
The host of angels in the sky  
look down with sad and wond'ring eyes  
to see th'approaching Sacrifice.

4 Ride on, ride on in majesty!  
Your last and fiercest strife is nigh.  
The Father on His sapphire throne  
awaits His own anointed Son.

5 Ride on, ride on in majesty!  
In lowly pomp ride on to die,  
bow Your meek head to mortal pain,

then take, O Christ, Your pow'r and reign.

This venerable hymn wonderfully expresses the irony of the cross. Our Lord and Savior, meek and lowly, rides into Jerusalem seated upon a beast of burden, dreading the task that He must undertake, but knowing that there is no other way, and He therefore embraces the task with the required courage. He must suffer and die if He would reign.

But, brothers and sisters, let us not conclude from Christ's suffering that suffering is past. In Christ, we reign, and we shall reign. But just as Christ's kingdom is not focused upon gathering to Himself earthly political power, neither is our reign focused upon this world as it now stands. Like Christ, our reign is largely about our suffering in love for God. Second Timothy 2:12 says, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us." And our epistle this morning began, "LET this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant." If we would be saved, we too must take on the mind of Christ and enter into His suffering; we must spend our lives for the love of God.

Is this daunting? It should be for it was also daunting for Christ. In the Garden of Gethsemane, His anxiety was so great that His sweat become like drops of blood. Yet He persisted. He was undeterred. Let us therefore take courage from both His example and in knowing that the glory laid up for us in Christ far exceeds all that we can ask or imagine. As we follow Christ's footstep this week to the cross, remember that His path is ours as well. We likely are not called to be crucified, but we are called to be living sacrifices, made acceptable by the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus. Therefore, by the grace of Christ in us, let us embrace this call, and may our worship this week inspire us to greater suffering and greater glory.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN.