

HOMILY
PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD
APRIL 9, 2017
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BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE
OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Dear brothers and sisters, dear friends in Christ, to all of you who are present here today in this magnificent National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and to those of you who are spiritually united with us through the Eternal Word Television Network, especially the homebound, may these days of Holy Week be for you, for your families and all your loved ones a singular time of grace, healing and peace. I particularly wish to join our thoughts and prayers with those of the Christian faith who are celebrating these solemn days, especially our Orthodox brethren whose observance of Easter coincides this year with our own. My heartfelt wish, which is of course that of our Holy Father Pope Francis, is that all peoples throughout the world will feel a real closeness at this time as we strive to live as a human family in deeper communion with each other.

In today's Liturgy of Palm Sunday we have entered into the holiest of weeks, for it is the opportunity to draw particularly close to the Lord by accompanying Him and experiencing with Him the spiritually relived events of His Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

Pope Francis, in a Palm Sunday homily, said that "At the heart of this celebration, which seems so festive, are the words we heard in the Letter to the Philippians: 'He humbled himself' (2:8)... These words show us God's way and the way of Christians: it is humility... A way which constantly amazes and disturbs us; we will never get used to a humble God! He humbles himself to walk with his people, to put up with their infidelity... This week, Holy Week, which leads us to Easter, we will take this path of Jesus' own humiliation. Only in this way will this week be 'holy' for us too!" (2015)

How can we reconcile the idea that while we greet today with our *Hosannas* and songs of praise the one who is our King, we at the same time know that "He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant"?

Let us turn to the Passion Account of Our Lord that we have just heard in the Gospel of Saint Matthew, which has been called "the Gospel of the Kingdom." Jesus' Kingship is presented to us in this Gospel in various ways – as the newborn King of the Jews, yet found in the poverty of a manger, or as a teacher of parables filled with a vision about the Kingdom of God, yet not having a place to put his own head, or appearing as King in the parable of the Final Judgment, who identifies with the poor, the hungry and thirsty, the sick, the stranger and the imprisoned. Now in today's reading we see him as a condemned man, mockingly called "King of the Jews," and spat upon by the soldiers, given a crown of thorns upon his head, a reed as a scepter in his hands, a covering of purple, and then crucified like a common criminal.

But we know that this humbled Jesus, through his triumphant death and resurrection, will manifest Himself to be Lord of that Kingdom which is

*an eternal and universal kingdom,
a kingdom of truth and life,
a kingdom of holiness and grace,
a kingdom of justice, love and peace.*

(Preface of Christ the King)

Sometimes, however, our ordinary experience may make us feel far from that Kingdom; our sins can make us feel alienated and separated from that reality. But this is precisely why we are accompanying Jesus on his journey today into Jerusalem, right to the gibbet of the Cross. For by that Cross of humiliation He broke down the great barricade of sin and evil that separates and divides us and prevents us from entering the Kingdom. He who gave us the very pattern of holiness as the great teacher on the Mount of Beatitudes, lays down his life for us on the Mount of Calvary so that we can one day share in the joy of the blessed – those who are poor in spirit and pure of heart, who mourn and are merciful, who are peacemakers and persecuted, and who hunger and thirst for justice.

We wave our palm branches today with joyful chant of *Hosanna* in acclamation of our King. Yet, we must be sure that after welcoming Jesus as King we do not then forsake Him in the helpless and poor among us. We might accept Him as our glorious King, but we might not accept him as a meek and humble king, one who has truly emptied himself and taken the form of a servant. We must continually learn to accept God on His terms and how He chooses to come to us.

May this Holy Week be most meaningful for each of us. Let us pray for the grace to personally encounter and embrace Jesus in a fuller and richer way than we ever have before, to experience His passion more deeply in ourselves and in one another, to feel His presence especially in those who are suffering in any way, and in particular in those who have been alienated by us and made to feel alone, abandoned, unwanted, and unloved.

O humble Jesus, make us firm in our resolve to love you more and more this Holy Week and all the days of our lives. Lead us into your Kingdom. Amen.