

## Palm Sunday St.Margaret of Antioch 2020

### Homily. “ a week is a long time in the life of the world”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest”

“My God My God why have you forsaken me?”



Each day for some of us at the moment seems like a week, and each week like a month or even more – so many demands on our time, our prayers our minds, our life. And how very different it is to do all this without human contact – real contact for talking with is not the same as being with. Things that used to matter don't – or ought not to, things we took for granted we no longer do. I wonder if our changed lives and priorities will turn out to be as short lived and fickle as the crowds of 2000 years ago. They start the week welcoming Jesus with cries of hosanna in the highest, Jesus ends the week alone, despised and rejected. It is a week that changes all time.

Palm Sunday sermons are normally short, or should be, as it is a liturgy and day when we do things together rather than listen to words – or we should. We gather outside, process with palms and song – a procession of faith and confession (there is no formal confession or creed for this reason). We all play our part in the drama of the passion narrative and it never fails to move because we are not outsiders but there in the crowd, whichever character we happen to identify with at our stage of faith and life. It is a liturgy about **being** not talking – a liturgy where we feel we are in it together or should be.

At the outset of this period of isolation I said to some that it seemed like an endless Good Friday. A Good Friday of old - quiet streets hushed tones and a strange aloneness. Perhaps this Holy Week, so different as it will be, will afford us a new insight and an *aloneness* that may bring a *oneness* with the life of the God - the God we worship who dies and is buried alone, and yet out of that, bursts through the gates of death, brings hope, a new togetherness and being - a new community. In the history of the Church – the embodiment of that new community, it has always been at its strongest when evil regimes and dark forces seek to destroy it – that is still true today.

On Mothering Sunday when our bishops required the closure of our churches for even personal prayer and worship, I said that the “The coming weeks and months will test whether we can hear Christ's call from the cross and live – really live”. Jesus call from

the agony and aloneness of the cross to his Blessed mother and beloved disciple, was for a new home, a new community.

Last week on Passion Sunday with the raising of Lazarus, we were reminded that Jesus's two days of being alone and doing "nothing" was far from it: that his prayer relationship with God was the very source of action, light and new life. A relationship that defeats the darkest of forces and overcomes even death.

As we enter into the teeth of this crisis and the heart of our faith in Holy week and Easter, we are confronted by the harshest of realities and by amazing love. We know which will win out. But Palm Sunday, is a stark reminder that although we are all called to play our part – the crowd is fickle, memory short and moral and physical courage often weak.

How heartening it is for many to hear the cheers on the streets on a Thursday evening for those who sacrificially care for others, in homes and hospitals, for those who preserve law and order, security and peace and our basic needs and services. *We clap not institutions but people within them.* People who care, often in spite of the structures they work in which do not always serve us well. Will our values and applause be fickle like the crowds of Palm Sunday? It is a big question - time will tell.

Jesus in a week, goes from the honour reserved for a king surrounded by the crowds, to the punishment on a cross due a criminal and the total loneliness of the tomb. He goes from being lauded with palms to being tortured, whipped, despised and rejected. Yet he is the same, God does not change – we do. And there is the cause of our hope. *The call to change*, to see in him the joy and salvation of the world, the source of true meaning and life – whether lauded with palms or hanging on the cross. For in joy and in sorrow we are called to be a new community. A community of being not talking, of real engagement with each other because we are engaged with God, a community built on relationships not things – in short an Easter community. We hope and pray, but there is a long week ahead.

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