

Homily Palm Sunday 21

When my two boys, James and John, were at primary school (centuries ago) I wrote a little book for them in the run up to Christmas. The book was entitled 'Nazar' and was the story of the donkey chosen to carry the pregnant Mother of God, Mary, to Bethlehem. Nazar was a donkey like any other, a beast of burden going about his/her humble tasks with diligence until one day she/was CHOSEN to carry The Saviour of the World to His place of birth in a lowly stable. The moral of the story was 'do your very best in life with the gifts God has given you and humbly do what He expects of you and be prepared to be surprised.'

In today's Entrance Gospel Jesus enters into Jerusalem riding again on a donkey. Not on a thoroughbred stallion as earthly kings would have done but on a humble and lowly beast of burden. In so doing Jesus was announcing that His Kingdom would not be about power or money or authority, not about palaces or castles, not about building empires or invading other nations. Jesus was announcing a Kingship of humble service and a Kingdom of humility where peace would reign, mercy and compassion would be practised, holiness would be sought after and where sacrifice would be required of all of its subjects.

The people waved palms as Jesus processed into Jerusalem and chanted 'Hosanna to the Son of David', basically actions to herald a newly crowned king and the long awaited Messiah. Only a few days later would that same crowd's joy and celebration turn into hatred and condemnation.

For almost 2000 years God had intervened in the salvation history of the Chosen People slowly revealing the nature of The Messiah. In the 7th Century BC in particular The Prophet Isaiah had made it clear in The 4 Songs of The Servant of Yahweh that the Messiah would be a Suffering Servant and not a worldly powerful monarch. In Isaiah 53 the true nature of the promised Messiah and God's salvific plan are clear

Jesus' Kingdom is both a spiritual and a physical Kingdom. It's through spiritual rebirth that we can continue to make The Kingdom physically present here and now. The active and humble care of the sick, the lonely, the dying, the imprisoned, the marginalised, the poor, strangers, widows and orphans builds up Christ's Kingdom on earth. This takes sacrifice and personal humility, inevitably leading to people 'saying all kinds of calumny against you' on His account 'rejoice and be glad for your reward will be great in heaven', where Jesus' Kingdom will be perfected.

Being a disciple of Christ is being a bit like Nazar, a humble beast of burden who accepted the task God had chosen for her/him but is spoken of and written about even after 2000 years - Truly a God of Surprises