



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

Palm Sunday- April 5th 2020

Readings: Isaiah 50: 4-7, Psalm 21, Philippians 2: 6-11,

Matthew 26: 14-27: 66

To say that Holy Week, in the Christian calendar, is an emotional rollercoaster is something of an understatement. From the highs of Palm Sunday to the utter depths of Good Friday, to the eternal heights of the Paschal Mystery which sweeps us up into the life of God, it is a week of shattering contrasts and utter exhaustion. People often say, ‘Christmas must be your busy time, father.’

To which the reply is, ‘Christmas is a doddle. Try Lent, Holy Week and Easter.’

This year is, of course, utterly different. No-one in church. The bells silent. The doors locked. The prayer wheels turning but at home and in the priests’ house chapels. The liturgies filmed but necessarily truncated by the absence of processions, foot washing, watch, dawn fires et al. We are stripped down to a minimum. Joined, from the relative safety of our dwellings, by the miracles of modern technology and, above all, by the supernatural ubiquity of prayer.

Today is Palm Sunday – the day of the long Gospel – the day when we recall our part in the Crucifixion of Christ and welcome Him into the

capital city of our hearts. It's always difficult to get a grip on Palm Sunday because, unlike the original disciples, we know what is coming next.

Christ's entry into Jerusalem, the cries of assent and recognition in the crowd, the royal procession fulfilling the prophecy and alerting the terrified authorities to the possibilities of civil disaster, is a day of utter jubilation. For the disciples the long years on the road are now about to receive their reward. The jostling for Cabinet seats in the new Jesus Government is the background noise.

Today, wryly, we look with unusual envy on those times when such a crowd was the most natural thing in the world and we did not have to measure our distance for fear our lovely neighbours or the unknown passer-by may inadvertently be the source of hidden ruin. Today we almost expect the Jesus procession to be brought up short by the Temple Police enquiring if this is really a necessary journey.

But then Jerusalem was in fete. The great feast of liberation and nationhood and commitment to the One God and the escape from slavery and the protection from the Angel of Death is about to go into full swing. The disciples did not know what we know.

The Gospel begins with one small but significant aside.

For whatever reason Judas Iscariot is bailing out. Whatever his dreams of Christ's kingdom were, he is disappointed, bitter, determined to change sides. He goes to the establishment and offers to sell Jesus out. Betrayal. The term used in the Greek for the word 'betray' is literally 'to hand over'.

And thereby hangs a tale..... for it is the task of every disciple to hand Jesus on. The same word encompasses the root of the Greek word for 'tradition' – the handing on, the handing over.

What separates Judas from Peter and the rest of the faithful is that Judas seeks to hand over Jesus to the enemy. He has despaired of Christ but is still masquerading as His minister.

The faithful, albeit flawed disciples, seek to hand Jesus on to the world, to the next generation.

That is the meaning of the Apostolic Tradition of the Universal Church.

What separates Judas from Peter is Judas' malicious intention. He operates from within the Church to destroy, if that were possible, the Church, the Body of Christ. He is a collaborator with the power of the enemy. He has sold out to the secular agenda. He has ceased to believe but maintains the pretence. What separates Peter from Judas is that, when he fails Christ – as fail he spectacularly does – he weeps and repents himself of his cowardice and faithlessness, returns and recommits.

In those tears and that intention is enshrined the heavenly road.

Failures all, we seek to hand on the Christ we know and love.

In the traitor's kiss in the garden and the sale of the truth is captured the dark road to the dungeons of the eternal darkness.

We, disciples and apostles of our generation, follow Peter and the Tradition – the tear stained trouper who will walk in triumph into Jerusalem, fail with fear, be renewed in Christ's mercy and go out to hand on the eternal gift of the Crucified and Risen Lord to all who would seek salvation.

Let us walk with Him into the Holy City while this great and final crisis unfolds