



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

Palm Sunday – Year C

Hosanna! Save us Lord!

Readings: Isaiah 50: 4-7, Ps 21, Philippians 2: 6-11, Luke 22: 14-23: 56

One of my few moments of nostalgia for Anglicanism is on Palm Sunday. In the Anglican rite there is no sermon! Having read the entire Gospel of the Passion it is assumed that the people have heard enough and that even the wisest priest has nothing to add. Well, we are where we are and it is, on reflection, a small price to pay for our membership of the Universal Church and its sacramental certainty.

I want to concentrate on one tiny part of today's account – the word 'Hosanna'. I remembered being shocked when hearing a jolly and enthusiastic priest waxing large on the fact that 'Hosanna' really meant 'Hurrah' and charging in and out of the congregation encouraging them to shout this unfamiliar translation to get 'in the mood'.

Of course, it doesn't mean that at all – however raucously we shout it or the original crowd may have screamed it. Hosanna is an appeal for salvation. It is the excited crowd of the faithful watching, waiting, expecting deliverance – from the immediate occupying powers of the mighty Roman Empire but, at a deeper level, the true and eternal liberation of the soul from the powers of evil and the fulfilment of salvation history. HOSANNA - 'SAVE US, Lord.'

The entry of the longed-for Saviour, through the Golden Gate, into the capital city of Jerusalem and into the capital city of our hearts, is the moment when redemption becomes a real possibility. The Saviour from on high has come to redeem His people. Well might we add, as a joyful afterthought, 'Hurrah'.

The whole story, of course, hinges on the fact that the people know their need of salvation. If today you were to offer most people 'salvation' they would probably respond, 'from what?'

The response in the Eucharistic Prayer, 'Save us Saviour of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free', would not make sense to a non-believer. Only a man who knows that his land is occupied knows that he needs the army of liberation. Only a man who knows his soul is enslaved to sin knows the need of a loving master who will pay the price of his redemption. It is then a complete mystery to me why Catholics, brought up in this knowledge, visit the confessional so extraordinarily infrequently for the most part or, in many cases – despite the fact that a minimum requirement to qualify as a practising Catholic is once a year – not at all.

After all the very pillars of prayer on which our central act of worship rests are Penitence and Eucharist – Sorry and Thank you. The route to the profound gratitude of the ransomed heart that pours out in the central prayer of the liturgy and leads us to the Encounter with Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is via the Confessional. For the Confessional is where we come to terms with the ultimate reality of God and the current reality of ourselves. It is where we acknowledge how far short we have fallen of the glory of God and how much He loves us still and how the Heavens rejoice at our turning and truth-telling and acceptance of that love at the mercy seat.

Confession is the place where we lay our weary burden down. It is the foot of the Cross where we see the terrible and wonderful price that has been paid for our blunderings and wickednesses and neglects and omissions and failures of love. Confession is the place where we, par excellence, know the depths of the love of God and know that we are fully known – and loved still.

I often refer to the Sacrament of confession and Reconciliation as the supreme sacrament of Liberation. Forever loading ourselves with more toxic junk, we put on a false face and stagger on under the weight of our deceit, mask to the world, pretending that even God does not see our ridiculous follies. Here, at the foot of the Cross, there is no room for pretending any more. Here, in the privileged

company of a fellow sinner, for that is what the priest is, we can be truly ourselves and cast ourselves upon the transforming mercy of God. Counselling by the Holy Ghost and Absolved by the representative of Christ's authority, we may leave the place of our embarrassment and shame and wounded pride and know the glorious freedom of the redeemed. Liberated by the Blood of Christ, loved by the Sacred Heart of Jesus, our little hearts are overcharged with joy and flowing over with thanksgiving, a thanksgiving that finds its summit in the Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass.

Two thousand years ago an excited and hopeful crowd welcomed Jesus the Saviour through the Golden Gate into the Holy City, Jerusalem. Apart from the brief interlude of the Crusader Kingdom, that gate has been walled up with rubble and rubbish to prevent the Messiah's return. As if.....

But it is a metaphor for the human heart. If we would welcome the Messiah into the capital city of our hearts then we need must clear the way, remove the blocking ruins of our former lives, dispose of the rubbish that inhibits and despoils the sacred site and open up to Jesus.

If we would truly keep Holy Week then we need must make our priests busy in the confessional. The road to the Altar runs through the Confessional – just as the way to the miracle of the Third Day and the Apotheosis on the Bethany Road lies through the Calvary. Then, liberated by His extraordinary mercy and grace, recall, with a joyful and thankful and liberated heart, just how much Christ loves you.