

Good morning brothers and sisters in Christ! Today we are celebrating Palm Sunday as well as the beginning of Holy Week. And it is strange to be commemorating this special day without being able to gather together with you for public worship and for our joyful Palm Sunday procession with singing and the Passion reading. Instead we are separated physically at this time of sheltering in place...but I hope you feel, as I do, that we are still together in spirit and in Christ as the Church.

Historically, we know that Christians have lived through many times when they could not gather for public worship – times of persecution certainly, but also in times when there were plagues or widespread disease that prohibited them from gathering. People have been quarantined over the centuries – and the word “quarantine” comes from the practice going back to the 14th century when ships returning from diseased ports were required to dock for 40 days – and no one could leave the ship nor attend public worship during that time. The word quarantine comes from 2 Latin words meaning “40 days” - so ironically, we are observing Lent – which lasts 40 days during a time of quarantine - meaning 40 days –which, as we know, will extend beyond 40 days. But we pray it will not have to last much longer than that.

But I think it's important to remember that what we're experiencing now is not new – that we will get through this just as generations before us have gotten through it. I imagine my own kids telling their kids about this Pandemic one day, and what Holy Week was like, and what we did to manage through it. This is a certainly Lent and Holy Week to remember. A parishioner texted Fr. Mark and I a meme this past week that read, “This is the Lentiest Lent I have ever Lented.” Indeed.

But if you're like me, this has also been a time of anxiety. It's easy to worry when the messages all around us give us good reasons to worry. I've thought a lot about worry and its lack of usefulness lately. I'm reminded me of the story of the husband who said to his wife who was prone to worrying, “Why do you worry so much? Your worry

isn't helping anything.” To which she replied, “Well of course my worrying is helping -because 90% of the things I worry about don't come to pass!”

That statistic is actually about right – there was a study done on worry and people tracked what they worried about over several months. As researchers went back to examine the worries, they learned that 94.1% of the worries never happened.

But you may say, this is different...between our health, the economy, and our finances we have plenty to worry about. And I get it. We know that fear can and is a useful emotion because it can help protect us from danger. And so to the extent that fear and worry is helping us – it serves its purpose. The problem is when fears and worries take up too much residence in our hearts and minds – because then it can sap us of our ability to live the life of faith, hope, and peace, which we are invited to do in Christ. Anxiety is understandable - but not what we'd hope for. And you may be in need of a dose of peace and calm in your life right now – and I'd like to suggest that God wants that for you too.

With that in mind, let's look at the events of Palm Sunday and see how they might inform us in this challenging time. You see, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey in the first century to the cheers of the crowds, the vast majority of those people were living at a subsistence level – they were constantly in danger, certainly of health concerns, which were always a problem without modern medicine, but of hunger and starvation as well. For them, if the crops failed they would starve - because there were no safety nets, government help, or other programs to aid them. That's why when Jesus taught his followers not to worry about what they would eat or drink, it was such a radical message – because those were very real worries at the time. The people of Jesus' day were looking for a warrior king to save them from their earthly struggles – this is why they could praise Jesus on Sunday and wave palms, but jeer at him and demand his crucifixion days later – because he made it clear that his mission was one of peace and spiritual salvation rather than an overthrow of the

current earthly system. The anxiety of the people of that day caused them to miss the gift that Jesus was offering them – the gift of peace and a comfort that goes far beyond the immediate physical context but brings us into a place of even deeper and more abiding peace, faith, and hope...the assurance that our lives are in God's hands and that God loves us far more than we can imagine - shown by sending his Son to conquer sin and death.

In our anxieties run amuck, we may miss the gift that God has for us too. Like the people gathered that day in Jerusalem spreading palms in what would be the week that lead to Jesus' crucifixion, we can miss the bigger picture of what God is up to. We, like them, may get shortsighted – forgetting that God is offering us salvation in Christ now, today, and has called us to rest our hearts and souls in the love and mercy of God...and find peace there.

Notice the actions of Jesus on Palm Sunday. He knew the path he was on would lead to suffering and death but he did not submit to the anxiety – he continued to plan steadfastly, telling his disciples exactly where to find the donkey he would use, carrying out the plan and calling on his life, a plan that would fulfill the prophet's description of the Christ, the Messiah, who wrote, "Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey." Jesus knew he was in God's plan and lived it faithfully – and so can we.

Years ago, in the few weeks before I faced a deep personal loss, I was telling my spiritual director how scared I was of what could happen. I told her that I feared God would not protect me from the tragedy. She spoke very honestly to me and said, "You're right, the tragedy might happen – God doesn't promise that you won't face troubles and suffering in life – God promises that God will be with you when you do and will help you through it." She was right. I did face it but God was clearly with me throughout the ordeal and God brought me through it.

If we look to the events of Holy Week – we see that God did not prevent the suffering Jesus had to face in the Garden, or during his arrest and trial, or on the cross itself. But God brought Jesus through to the other side of it – even through death. We know that Holy Week will end with Easter...but right now we must walk the way of the cross, with Jesus. This week let's not miss the gifts that God has for us, precarious or insecure as we may feel, because we know that our lives, as Scripture says, are in God's hands. So, follow Jesus – carry on in the way of the cross - we are in good company - saints and generations have gone before us and the path from Jerusalem to the cross is not the end of the story... because God is with us. Thanks be to God.