

## Commentary to the Readings of PALM SUNDAY.

### MATTHEW 21. 1-11



Jesus began the last week of his life. He had spent the night before (the Sabbath evening) in Bethany with Lazarus, Mary and Martha (Jn 12. 1f). He deliberately demonstrated that he was the Messiah, the One prophesied to be the Saviour of the world. The secret his disciples had been forbidden to reveal was now proclaimed as Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. All four Gospels record the event; Matthew's is stamped with from Zechariah 9:9. Here the unknown writer sees a cessation of the war with which his people are beset; the paraphernalia of battle will no longer be needed; peace will be widespread; the king will enter "riding on a donkey, on a colt the foal of a donkey", not on a horse, the animal of war. All this applied to Jesus as he makes his Messianic entry into Jerusalem. He was the fulfilment of prophecy, the One for whom all righteous people had longed and looked.

### First Reading: Isaiah 50. 4-7

From Chapter 40 onwards the Book of Isaiah is commonly called Deutero- or Second Isaiah, the work of another hand. In the portion to be read, the Jews were in exile in Babylon where their captors, the Chaldeans, had taken them in 587 B. C. The prophet never ceased to encourage the people to have hope in the future. Between Chapters 42 and 53 there are four Songs of the Suffering Servant. Here we have the third and in it the Servant discloses the source of his power which trust and obedience. Though persecuted, the Servant does not doubt God's vindication. The Church has naturally seen Christ as the Suffering Servant.

### Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 21. 8-9, 17-20, 23-24

There are other psalms in which the writer laments his lot, but none like this one. There is no reference to sin as the cause of his trouble, nor is there any cry for vengeance on his enemies. Often called the "Passion Psalm", it is quoted in all four Gospels. Nothing so exalts it as Our Lord's first word on the Cross: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" words taken from the first line of the psalm.

Our Lord thus applies the psalm to himself.

### **Second Reading: Philippians 2. 6-11**

Paul writing to the Philippians from prison is speaking about the Christian life and in Chapter 2, in response to a local situation, makes a plea for unity. Into this setting that constitutes the reading. This is not the only hymn that has found its way into the New Testament. Their identification is not easy as there was no literary code regarding quotations. The hymn to Christ falls into two parts, his humiliation and his subsequent glorification.

### **Gospel: Matthew 26. 14-27, 66**

In mediaeval times the Gospel on this day was sung in assigned parts and during the singing it was customary to hold palm branches in the hand. The long reading covers events from Judas' agreement with the chief Pharisees, to the Lord's death and burial and includes the institution of the Lord's Supper, the betrayal, Jesus on trial, the crucifixion and one account of Judas' death.

Judas stands as a great warning to every person including the strongest believer. Judas was one of the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus. He was a man with so much potential that he was chosen to serve God's very own Son during his earthly journey, but failed and came ever so short. In the first part of this episode we see Judas' great tragedy was the rejection of the great call of Jesus, the gnawing sin of greed and the love of money and finally Judas' carrying out a deceitful intrigue against Jesus.

The second part of the Gospel talking about the Lord's Supper. He instituted the Last Supper as the preparations for the Passover. The disciples knew nothing about the Lord's intentions to institute a new ordinance in His name. They thought Jesus was preparing to celebrate the Jewish Pass-over. This is significant, for it shows that Christ tied both his death and the Lord's Supper to the Passover. By tying His Supper to the Passover, Jesus was proclaiming himself to be the Messiah whom Israel anticipated the deliverance of God for Israel out of Egypt bondage. Secondly sacrificial lamb used in the Passover was a picture of Christ, the Lamb of God, sacrificing himself for people. By instituting the Lord's Supper, Jesus was proclaiming himself to be the Lamb of God who was to be slain for the sins of people and he was proclaiming the Lord's Supper to be the new celebration which was to be observed by his followers. The Lord's Supper was to replace the Passover, a person's celebration of God's deliverance from bondage.

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