

## Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2019

“And when he was now coming near the descent of mount Olivet, the whole multitude of his disciples began with joy to praise God with a loud voice, for all the mighty works they had seen, Saying: Blessed be the king who cometh in the name of the Lord, peace in heaven, and glory on high!” (Lk 19:37-38). Yes, you would be right in thinking: we have just joined the triumphal entry of Jesus on Palm Sunday. Yet, while the other Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and John, have him then immediately entering the city of Jerusalem amidst these acclamations, St Luke has him weeping as his disciples appeared to be rejoicing: “And when he drew near, seeing the city, he wept over it, saying: If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace; but now they are hidden from thy eyes” (Lk 19:41-42).

The “whole multitude” of disciples rejoiced because of “all the mighty works they had seen” (Lk 19:37), while the Lord wept because he knew however that Jerusalem herself would prove blind to these same “works”: “they are hidden from thy eyes” (Lk 19:41-42). The Lucan triumphal entry is therefore tinged with a touch of sadness, as it indeed is, though implicitly, in the accounts in the three other Gospels: Yes, he, the Son of David, the Messiah, is entering David’s city of Jerusalem, but we know that it is nevertheless in order to suffer, to be crucified, and to die; an event tinged with sadness, even though the outcome will eventually be joyful: he will rise again from the dead, a week after entering the city.

Jerusalem is, in a sense, Christ’s own city; since at the Annunciation, in St Luke’s Gospel, it was promised that: “the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father” (Lk 1:32). Yet, although a “whole multitude of his disciples” (Lk 19:37) accompany his entry into his city with joy; the city herself does not of course welcome him in the same way. A similar thing, presumably unbeknown to his disciples, had already happened to him, as recorded again in Luke, in that other city of David – not his capital, this time but his birthplace – Bethlehem. Just as the “whole multitude of his disciples began with joy to praise God” (Lk 19:37) and shout: “Blessed be the king who cometh in the name of the Lord, peace in heaven, and glory on high!” (Lk 19:38), close to Jerusalem; so “a multitude of the heavenly army, praising God” was heard to say: “Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will” (Lk 2:14), above some fields close to Bethlehem (cf. Lk 2:8).



How much rejoicing was there, human rejoicing that is, in Bethlehem on that first Christmas night? – Apparently none, apart from that of Our Lady and St Joseph of course, and then the rejoicing of the shepherds. Listen to the Gospel for the Day Mass of Christmas, usually read at every other Mass, including this Mass, as the Last Gospel: “He was in the world (*In mundo erat*), and the world was made by him (*et mundus per ipsum factus est*), and the world knew him not (*et mundus eum non cognovit*). He came unto his own (*In propria venit*), and his own received him not (*et sui eum non receperunt*)” (Jn 1:10-11). At Christmas, in the Incarnation, the Creator of “the world” therefore comes into his own creation but remains largely unrecognised and unwelcomed.

On Palm Sunday, thirty-three years later, Christ comes to another city known for its association with his ancestor David, Jerusalem, and again the city does not share the joy of the rejoicing crowds; earthly disciples though this time rather than heavenly hosts. “*In propria venit, et sui eum non receperunt* (He came unto his own, and his own received him not)” (Jn 1:11) – He came unto his own city, Jerusalem, and it “received him not” – Yes, some people of Jerusalem, akin to the shepherds of Bethlehem, would receive him, welcome him, and indeed listen to him; yet others, including the rulers of Jerusalem, would not only not receive him but actually reject him and have him crucified. Today’s Gospel ended with: “He was teaching daily in the temple” (Lk 19:47); though if we were to read the rest of the verse, we would find: “And the chief priests and the scribes and the rulers of the people sought to destroy him”.

To return to the Last Gospel: “But as many as received him (*Quotquot autem receperunt eum*), he gave them power to be made the sons of God (*dedit eis potestatem filios Dei fieri*), to them that believe in his name (*his qui credunt in nomine ejus*)” (Jn 1:12) – Hopefully, we are truly among those who

have “received him” and “believe in” him. Indeed, at every Mass, in the *Benedictus* (“*Benedictus, qui venit in nomine Domini*”), just prior to the Canon, we join those cheering disciples: “Blessed be the king who cometh in the name of the Lord (*Benedictus, qui venit rex in nomine Domini*), peace in heaven (*pax in caelo*), and glory on high (*et gloria in excelsis*)!” (Lk 19:38) – And therefore when we say or sing, also at Mass, the *Gloria in excelsis Deo* we join the joyful angels as well as the disciples.

Those disciples at the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, like the angels above Bethlehem, rejoice in the Lord whom they recognise; their thoughts subsequently fixed upon the things “on high” (*in excelsis*). And yet the Lord’s own thoughts turn instead to things seen here below, to “his own” who would not receive him (Jn 1:11): “seeing the city, he wept over it” (Lk 19:41). Although he knew that some would receive and believe in him (cf. Jn 1:12), he also knew that a number would not and that was a cause of sadness for him. God indeed wants, as St Paul would later tell Timothy: “all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tm 2:4), and indeed to receive that “power to be made the sons of God (*potestatem filios Dei fieri*)” (Jn 1:12), mentioned by St John in the Prologue to his Gospel.

At Mass, we give the Lord praise, as we sing or say the *Gloria* and the *Benedictus*, before which we express sorrow for our sins, not exactly weeping though nevertheless beating our breast, as the server says: “*mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*”, on your behalf, during the *Confiteor* (I, of course, have my own!). At every Mass, we are in a sense entering the holy city of Jerusalem and the Temple on its Mount, just like the Lord himself on Palm Sunday, for which we ask for guidance in the words of Psalm 42, also said at the foot of the altar: “Send forth thy light and thy truth (*Emitte lucem tuam et veritatem tuam*); they have conducted me (*ipsa me deduxerunt*), and brought me unto thy holy hill (*et adduxerunt in montem sanctum tuum*), even into thy tabernacles (*et in tabernacula tua*)” (Ps 42:3).

And it is not only to the Temple, “thy tabernacles”, which we will ascend but to the actual altar and God’s very presence: “*Et introibo ad altare Dei* (And I will go to the altar of God); *ad Deum, qui laetificat juventutem meam* (to God, who gives joy to my youth)” – Now that is true “joy”, though in order to enter the ‘Holy of Holies’ and reverently kiss the altar we then need to pray, still aware of our sinfulness (in the silent prayer of the priest): “*Aufer a nobis, quaesumus, Domine, iniquitates nostras* (Take away from us our iniquities, we pray, O Lord); *ut ad Sancta sanctorum* (that into the Holy of Holies) *puris mereamur mentibus introire* (we may be worthy with pure minds to enter).