

PALM SUNDAY

At the Christmas event, Jesus comes into the world announced by angels, proclaiming, 'Glory to God in the highest.' And yet Jesus, God, comes into the world as a humble, weak and feeble baby, He is born in Bethlehem, quietly unknown to the world, He slips into the world to begin His journey to Jerusalem.

Today, Jesus enters Jerusalem announced not by angels, but by the very people He has come to save, to redeem, to heal, to bring to wholeness, to love, so that we can be fully at one with God. Jesus enters Jerusalem not hidden to the world, but presented to the world, to great shouts of acclaim, 'Hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.'

Today, Jesus does not enter Jerusalem as an unknown, weak and feeble (baby) man, but rather He enters Jerusalem as a kingly figure – as a Messianic figure. The crowd have recognised He is a son of David, a particular title and a particular ancestry required for the Messiah, they have acknowledged that He has come in the name of the Lord (that He has been sent by God) and they sing 'Hosanna in the highest,' an echo of the angels at Christmas, 'Glory to God in the highest.'

His entry into Jerusalem (as it happens, through a triumphal gate from the times of the Maccabees from the OT - who rode through this same gate on war horses) – but Jesus' entry, appearing to be somewhat triumphal is cloaked in humility, for He does not ride on a war horse, but rather on a humble donkey. And, as we read our second reading, we see again a reflection of Jesus' humble entry into the world through the stable at Bethlehem – 'His state was divine, yet Christ Jesus did not cling to His equality with God, but emptied Himself to assume the condition of a slave and became as men are, and being as all men are, He was humbler yet, even accepting death on a cross.'

Jesus was not fooled by such adulation - He knew that soon His humbleness and self-emptying would be put to the ultimate test. The shaking of palm leaves and the placing of cloaks on the ground at His feet in acceptance of His 'greatness' - of His messianic credentials, in their hopeful eyes, would soon be replaced with shaking of fists and the placing of abuse and spittle at His face, as they are all too easily turned away from Him as the hoped for Messiah, by the influential and yet fearful leaders of the palm wavers.

How difficult it is to let go of power, influence, ego - the leaders are incredulous that such an in-descript itinerant preacher, and apparent miracle worker could have such influence over so many of their people, and like Herod in the Christmas event these leaders also fear the power of such weakness and humbleness – they too like Herod plot to destroy and kill that which disturbs them so much. (Fr Ian Pettit OSB, says, 'That the Holy Spirit should thoroughly disturb us,' – The Holy Spirit calls us from our apparently comfortable worldliness, but bound by others' expectations of us, into the eternally knowable mystery of God's kingdom of freedom and Love – to know oneself perfectly in the Presence of the God who invites us to be just that, ourselves made in His Image and Likeness – His work of art!)

Perhaps, people in power are somehow always aware of the reality of the words of Mary at the Annunciation that she prayed in the prayer the Magnificat, 'He casts the mighty from their thrones, and raises the lowly. He fills the starving with good things, sends the rich away empty.'

And yet, if only they (and we of course) could see that the Lord has come into the world not to destroy but to bring to completion, not to injure but to heal, not to accuse but to pardon, not to lead us away from but to guide us into freedom and riches – the riches of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus' entry in the world as a humble baby and journey to the Cross in Jerusalem are the two most amazing points of ultimate surrender and humbleness that allow us today, to wave the palms of our hands genuinely at all peoples as the Children of God and to wave the love of our hearts not in fickle rejoicing but in true confidence that our God is the Lord and King of all, for all time and for all peoples – he does not select and hold onto power, rather He surrenders all back to humanity: He gives the Keys of the Kingdom to Simon Peter.