

Reflecting on Palm Sunday



Archdiocese of
Liverpool

Prepare to be attentive to *The God Who Speaks in this story.*



- Light a candle or tea light if possible.
- Perhaps place some leaves or a flower from the garden next to the light.

Begin by praying this prayer requested by Archbishop Malcolm:



God Our Father,
each person is precious to You.
You are the Giver of life.
Have mercy on us and protect us at this time,
as the coronavirus threatens health and life.
You are an ever-present Helper in time of trouble.
Watch over those who are suffering,
give strength to those who are aiding the sick
and give courage to all in this time of anxiety.
We ask this of you in the name of your Son.
Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Now, breathe deeply and allow yourself to become still.



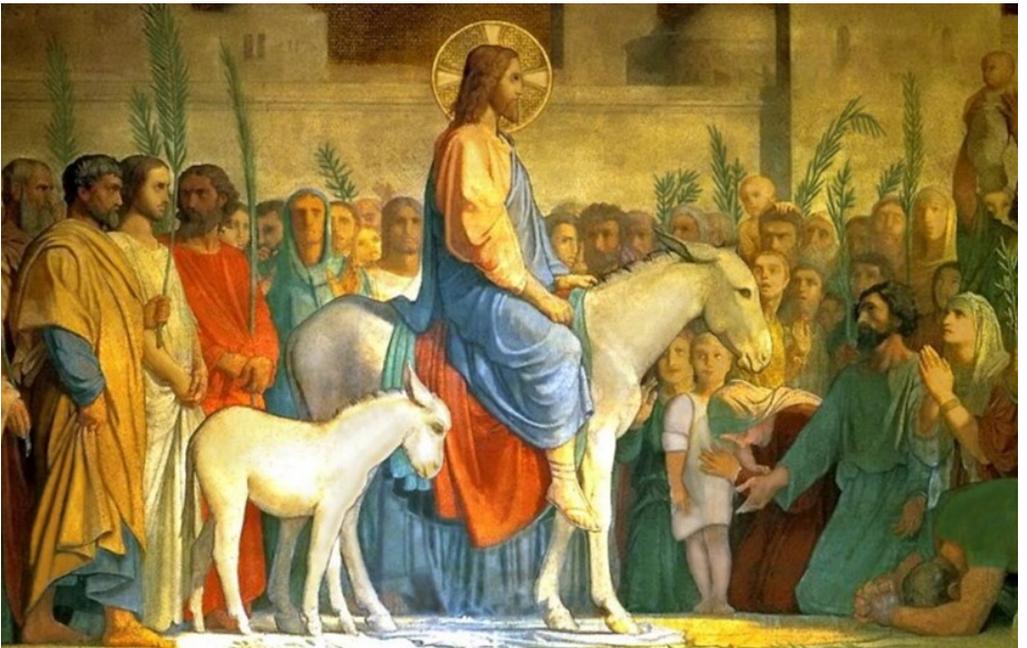
Let the music, *May the peace of God be with us*, help you to relax. [© Joanne Wallace 2020.]

Ask for God's grace and light to fill your heart and your mind as you open to the Word.



Spend some time just looking at the three images.

- Where is your eye drawn to?
- What feelings are you experiencing?
- What are you noticing?





Pray the Responsorial Psalm *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* by Joanne Wallace.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All who see me deride me.
They curl their lips, they toss their heads.
'He trusted in the Lord, let him save him;
let him release him if this is his friend.'

Many dogs have surrounded me,
a band of the wicked beset me.
They tear holes in my hands and my feet
I can count every one of my bones.

They divide my clothing among them.
They cast lots for my robe.
O Lord, do not leave me alone,
my strength, make haste to help me!

I will tell of your name to my brethren
and praise you where they are assembled.
'You who fear the Lord give him praise;
all sons of Jacob, give him glory.
Revere him, Israel's sons.

Now, either read slowly to yourself the story below or better still, read it aloud, again slowly.

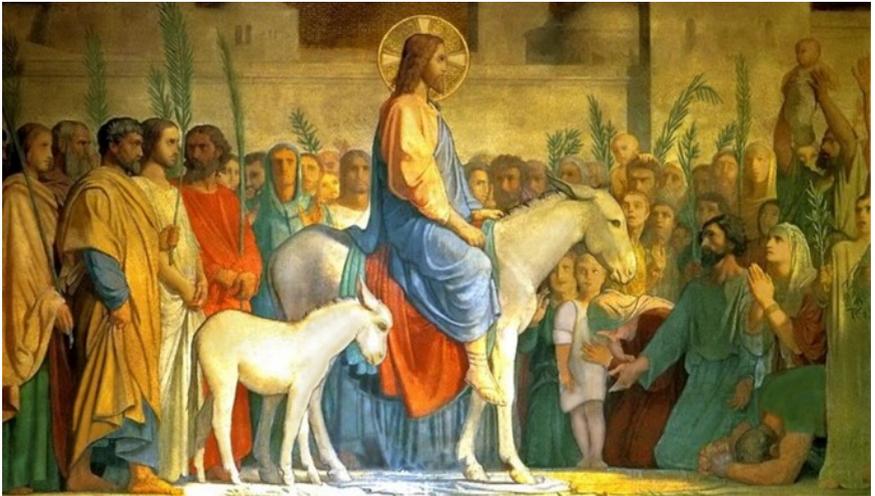
From the Gospel according to Matthew 21: 1-11



When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately.'

This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,
'Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.



The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,
'Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Now visit the part of the story that seems to be most important for you.

Read this part a second time, aloud if possible, and allow it to nourish you before reading Fr Chris Thomas' reflection...



For most of my life until she died, Teresa was a dear friend of my family. She was born at the beginning of the last century into dire poverty living in one of the courts off Scotland Road, Liverpool. She was one of nine children and money was tight. Her father was a docker who seldom worked. Her mother scrubbed floors to try and make ends meet. Teresa left school at 9 and worked on the markets to try and bring money into the family. Despite her hard life her whole existence was centred on God. She didn't have any theology degree, but she exuded God and was so "in tune" with God that she knew beyond doubt that she was forgiven for her failures and loved completely and unconditionally. That meant that she could face whatever happened with peace knowing that God was present.

It strikes me that that this is the way of living that God invites us into. Jesus became flesh so that we would see the sort of intimacy that God wants to have with us. Jesus' relationship with God is so close and intimate that he seems to know by instinct what God's will for him is; he has a personal authority and power that astound those who encounter him. He's driven with an energy to live life to the full. He lets God's love, compassion and mercy in his healing and teaching flow through him. He expresses God's anger against self-righteousness and hypocrisy and that brings us face to face with the true and terrible cost of knowing God, of intimacy and deep relationship with God. We see the cost that God is prepared to meet in order to show us the reality of forgiveness and life.

We see the paradox that in order to live, we have to die. The glory Jesus speaks of in John's Gospel is the shameful death of a common criminal. How can that be glory or triumph? How can a powerless victim of injustice be glorified? But that's what Jesus does throughout the torture, the mocking, the pain and humiliation. He does it by staying true and loyal to God's word of love. Failure for Jesus would have meant giving in to the human values of this world: cursing his enemies, getting the disciples to protect him with violence, protesting his innocence, thinking only of himself and fighting to be freed. The triumph and glory of the cross shine out in the love that stays true to itself to the bitter end; in the courage and conviction of a man who knows the love of God and who's prepared to pay the cost of that love.

The Gospel always faces us with choices, and we're faced again with a stark one. Today is Palm Sunday. As Jesus enters the City of David he is acclaimed as the Son of David. He is entering into his inheritance, but not as a triumphant conquering hero. He comes on a donkey, a beast that was a sign of peace. I often think that it's political power that fascinates us, not men on donkeys. Any philosophy of religion assumes that God should be omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. If Jesus is the image of God, he is turning that entire assumption on its head! God is not who we think God is. That terrifies us because it challenges us to let vulnerability be at the centre of our lives and none of us really want to do that. We can come together and sing Hosanna to the King of Kings. We can then come along on Easter Day and sing Alleluias. But if we do just that we'll miss the whole point of these days that we call holy. Jesus, came to live alongside us, to share in all the experiences of human life no matter how difficult, how painful or humiliating, no matter how frightening or overwhelming. He came to live alongside us and show us how we can meet those experiences when God's love is deep within us.

The events of Holy Week, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday might be difficult, challenging and painful but in a sense that's exactly why we need to experience them. So that when they happen in our lives, and they will, death, suffering, and pain are all part of the human condition; we'll know that we can face it all because we are caught up in the love of God which never ends.



Read through the poem written by Mary Oliver.

The poet thinks about the donkey.

On the outskirts of Jerusalem
the donkey waited.
Not especially brave,
or filled with understanding,
he stood and waited.
*How horses, turned out into the
meadow, leap with delight!
How doves, released from their cages,
clatter away, splashed with sunlight.*

But the donkey,
tied to a tree as usual, waited.
Then he let himself be led away.
Then he let the stranger mount.
Never had he seen such crowds!
And I wonder if he at all imagined
what was to happen.
Still, he was what he had always been:
small, dark, obedient.
*I hope, finally, he felt brave.
I hope, finally, he loved the man
who rode so lightly upon him,
as he lifted one dusty hoof and stepped,
as he had to, forward.*





As a result of your reflection, offer some prayers of intercession for the people and situations in our world today that seem to you to be most in need.

Our Father,
who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.



To end your time of reflection, listen to *Hosanna to the Son of David* by Dan Schutte.

Hosanna to the Son of David!
O blest is He, O blest is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

Rejoice, daughters of Zion, in the One who brings joy.
Sing praise, children of Judah for the Lord is close at hand.

Rejoice, all who are thirsting for the streams of living joy.
Sing praise, children of Judah, for the Lord is close at hand.

Rejoice, all who are longing to behold the face of God.
Sing praise, children of Judah for the Lord is close at hand.