

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Palm Sunday  
March 28, 2021

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In the introduction to his Gospel account, St John wrote that Christ was not received by His own. None of us is very likely to take in a stranger. When my family first moved to Boston our circumstances changed. We lived in a very large house. There were always extra bedrooms and even a separate two-room guest suite complete with kitchen and bath. Occasionally a person we had never met would arrive at the door. But he would have a letter of reference from some good friend who also would have called in advance. The Anglo-catholic world was small. When a traveler was coming to Boston he could stay with the Bradfords. So the man at the door had a claim on me, and we would welcome him. Our guest book was a veritable “Who’s Who” of the Anglo-catholic world.

But when Jesus Christ came, His own received Him not. And who were His own? Well, *the whole world* was His own. And in a special way the people among whom He lived were His own. He had a claim on them. Yet there was no room for Him at Bethlehem, or in the synagogue at Nazareth.

Then on Palm Sunday Jesus came to Jerusalem, and not for the first time. But what was different was *this* time He made a *dramatic entry*. The spectacle must have looked rather silly unless you knew the Bible. Secular people probably laughed scornfully, just as they do today at the Catholic Church. But pious Jews knew the scriptures and recognized this entry for what it was. They remembered the verse in Zechariah, and it was now coming to life before their eyes: “Rejoice, greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy king cometh unto thee. He is just and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass.”

That verse also comes to life before our eyes when on Palm Sunday we enact it in a procession. Sadly that procession was not possible this year due to pandemic protocols. But we also know the hopes and excitement did not last. The people acclaimed Jesus, but only for a moment. The mood swing happened quickly, much like the liturgical transition on Palm Sunday, from the festal procession to the solemn reading of the Passion.

The King said His kingdom was not of this world. The people wanted a victory over the Romans. Jesus only said something about conquering sin and death. The

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people might have accepted a lowly and humble king. But a suffering king, one who accepted the mocking of His enemies and his death as a slave? No. That was too much. So in the end they received Him not. It was just as St John had said. And the last rejection was in the high priest's complaint to Pontius Pilate: "Write not, the King of the Jews, but that *He said* 'I am the king of the Jews.'"

You and I are present-day followers of Jesus Christ. We take Him in. We acknowledge He has a claim upon us and that His claim is total. We gladly embrace the Holy Child of Bethlehem. We are comforted by our communions, absolutions, the Holy Scriptures, the fellowship of the community of faith, and the triumph of Easter. But before we get to Easter there is Holy Week. We are called to walk the Way of the Cross. And that means two things.

First, we must be ready to share Christ's sufferings. We won't be crucified. They don't do it that way anymore. And we can never bear the sins of the whole world. But we must be prepared to suffer for our loyalty to Christ. And as we receive all the pains and sorrows of life, we must accept them as our share in His passion, which is the sacrifice that redeems the world.

And second, there is something even more difficult than sharing Christ's sufferings. He is the conqueror of sin. We must allow Jesus Christ to conquer and kill the sins that crowd out His rightful place in our hearts. Christ has come to reign. Palm Sunday is clear about that. But His entry into Jerusalem shows a very different kind of reign, a reign not from a throne, but from your heart and mine. And before He can reign there, you and I must abdicate our selfishness and comfortable sins *to the King*.