

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, A – April 9, 2017 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Sat. Vigil, 8:30am Sunday Masses – 600 words

On that first Palm Sunday the joy-filled crowd shouted “Hosanna in the highest!” as the Lord Jesus entered into Jerusalem, riding along the palm-strewn way. They acclaimed him as Israel’s long-awaited Messiah and saw in his humble entrance into the holy city the fulfillment of ancient prophecy. But as we know so well and indeed just heard again, only a few days later the crowd would be shouting something very different: they no longer saw Jesus as the Messiah, their savior; rather, he was a criminal who was to be put to death, even if by means of trumped-up charges and a sham of a trial.

Why did the people then change their minds so drastically? The answer is found in a full reading of the four gospels, in which we see how they constantly had misplaced expectations with regard to the Christ. Over and over, we see that they were seeking a political sort of Messiah who would deliver them from their earthly enemies and give them a prosperous life on this earth. But that is not what Jesus came to do. He came to deliver us from the ancient enemy, the devil, and give us a life of bliss in heaven. He made no promises with regard to our life on this earth, except that we could have his peace if we followed after him.

In short, the people came to see that when Christ spoke about the cross, he meant it. And who wants the cross? This is the drama of all time. Simon of Cyrene did not want the cross – at least not at first; he would rather have stayed on the side of the parade route and watched. But instead, he was pressed into service; they made him carry it behind Jesus. We, very often, have not wanted the cross either. How many times would we have preferred a Christ who told us that everything would be OK and that we could live however we pleased? This is what the world today tells us. Look, for example, at the very many politicians and celebrities who boast of their Christian faith, all the while denying it by how they live and by what causes they support. How little the world has changed in 2,000 years!

The gospels also tell us that there was a crowd that followed Jesus and Simon, that apparently never turned against the Lord. Among them were the “holy women of Jerusalem”, whom we recall also from the Stations of the Cross. These devout women followed Christ regardless of what the larger crowd dictated. Tradition holds that others joined with them also, including Simon of Cyrene – and we now revere him as a saint. Though at first constrained to carry the cross, he was healed by it and came to be a man who followed Christ freely and wholeheartedly.

Whether we are more like Simon or more like the devout crowds, let us nevertheless stay close to the Lord during this Holy Week. It is as counter-cultural as ever to be a Christian. Many of our non-Catholic friends have already fast-forwarded to the end of the story – many are having Easter egg hunts this weekend and already feasting on the special foods. And so many others will live next week as if it were any other – indeed, as if they were still awaiting a Messiah who suited their own lifestyle better. But this week is not any other. It is the holiest week of the year, the time in which the Savior of the world died for us so that we could live.