

Palm Sunday – Pre-Procession Homily – April 14, 2019 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 10:30am Procession & 11am Mass – 450 words

These palms that we will soon carry in procession have been enriched with the Church's blessing; they have become one of her "sacramentals". Like so many objects that can be blessed (such as homes, automobiles, food, and so forth), they are thus "set apart" from ordinary things. They become channels of divine assistance, as it were, preparing us to receive God's grace and disposing us to cooperate with it.¹ We need to think about what graces, in particular, these blessed palms will prepare us to receive.

The first thing to consider is that we carry them in procession with our Lord. We desire to accompany him on his triumphal entry into the holy city. We wish to acclaim him our King also. We know that he is headed to his death – yes, we are headed toward ours, as well. But beyond his death is the resurrection: we cannot separate the two events. We join him in his sorrow; we will stand beneath the Cross and weep for what we have done that causes him to be there. But we will also rejoice in his resurrection.

So a first grace that we seek is the ability to walk with our Lord more faithfully and prepare ourselves well for our own death and resurrection.

A second thing for us to consider is what the palms symbolize. In traditional iconography, it is the martyrs who are depicted holding palms. Now we know that the word "martyr" means "witness": he or she bears witness to Christ by preferring to die for him rather than compromise on his or her faith. We are called to bear witness to Christ each day in our homes, among our friends, in our places of work, in the public square. God chooses us to bring our faith to bear in a world that in so many ways has turned its back on him.

So a second grace that we seek through these blessed palms is greater fidelity in bearing witness to Christ – today, each day of our lives, and unto death.

Many of us will later place these palms with our crosses at home, so to look upon them throughout the coming year and be reminded of what they symbolize. There they will remain as a pledge of divine help, so that we may acclaim Jesus as King all days and in every part of our lives. As we take part in this procession, let us see if our hearts are open to receiving the graces that God wishes to give. And may we also be glad that even if our life's journey necessarily brings us through suffering and death, yet Christ's victory awaits us on the other side.

¹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1670.