

Palm Sunday Thom Trunzo

Trying to do a homily or a reflection on today's scriptures is like trying to capture the wind. The readings are so powerful and, if you have ever stood facing a strong wind, know its great impact, but realize that so much of it swoops by.

Hundreds of years of translations and a multitude of cultural shifts over the 2,200 or more years of Christianity have distanced us from many of the symbols written in the scriptures. As a result, they either swoop by us when we encounter them, or we tend to give them our own 21st century meaning. So to focus on a few symbols in the Gospel, I ask the questions, "Why a donkey? Why did the people lay palms on the ground? Why did the people spread their cloaks on the ground?"

The more notable symbol of a king would be having him mounted on a horse. Often the king would be on a stallion, perhaps a bit larger than most other horses, but always the finest! The horse was powerful, capable of thundering speeds and because of these qualities, used extensively in waging war. Whenever a king would enter a city, he would be mounted on his steed, never walking! But the donkey is docile, much smaller than a horse, useless in battle, willing to take on burdens much greater than itself without complaint. Jesus enters the city riding, a symbol of kingship, but on the back of a donkey! He more than subtly announces his role as King or Peace!

Like our tradition of "rolling out the red carpet" upon which dignitaries are welcomed, the people specifically chose to open a walkway with palms. Ancient traditions of the Near East and Mediterranean World sought the use of palms to symbolize victory, triumph, peace and eternal life. Jesus enters the city not as ordinary king, but as a very specific type of king, triumphant, everlasting and ushering in victory that will not be characterized by domination and oppression, but rather distinguished by a reign of acceptance and peace!

The cloak or garment is an overlooked symbol that lost its significance through multiple translations and cultural shifts. The original word was "*tallit*" or "*prayer shawl*". It was a seamless garment with four corners. On each corner was a tassel that reminded them of God's commands. Around the perimeter the words *Lord of Lord, and King of Kings* was inscribed! The laying down *tallits* was more than just an act of honor; this was a profound declaration that Jesus was the King of Kings, the promised Messiah!

But as our liturgy unfolds, we hear Matthew's account of the passion & death of Jesus that came on the heels of this great entrance and proclamation. Many of the same people who *laid down their tallits* and proclaimed Jesus as their eternal king of peace would gather again only a few days later with voices raised even louder shouting, *Crucify him!*, a bold act of not only rejection, but of disdain for who he was and what he offered.

We humans are a fickle species! We profess our faith in baptism, proclaiming Jesus as our Priest, Prophet and King! We stand each Sunday during our liturgies and, with one voice, declare our faith through the Creed. Though we spiritually *lay down our tallits* vowing to follow our king, we seek after power, dominance, riches and make sinful choices by harboring hate, prejudices, indifference and unforgiving spirits. And while our voices are much more subtle than those gathered in front to Pilate the choices we make to sin scream just as loud, *Crucify him!* Granted, we would never mean that literally, but we proclaim it as a rejection of all that the king stands for; freedom, acceptance, everlasting peace!

The good news is that our story does not end on the cross, but merely begins there. Out of all our poor choices, there is ALWAYS the possibility of receiving as well as extending forgiveness, of changing our priorities, of surrendering hate by embracing the road of acceptance to peace that our king desires.

As we enter this year's Holy Week and approach the great feast of the Triduum, we have a chance to reconcile, to give-up selfishness and become more charitable, to name our sins and prejudices and then strive to become more accepting, to be a presence to those feeling trapped or isolated, to be part of the kingdom that offers everlasting peace.