



Lenten

Reflection Series

One Church, Many Voices

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Palm Sunday - March 28

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Today's scripture takes us from joy and triumph to despair and desolation. No other Sunday in the liturgical year reflects such dramatic contrast. Palm Sunday begins with songs of triumph and quickly shifts into the remembrance of the Lord's passion. His royal entrance into the holy city Jerusalem is also an entrance into the mystery of his suffering, death and resurrection.

As a child, I vividly remember going to Palm Sunday Mass with my family. All 13 of us were squished in a pew fighting over how many palms we got. I also remember the mass was a long one as my stomach rumbled for two hours. I wondered if the reason they provided palms was to keep us preoccupied during the long liturgy. I am surprised we did not eat them.

As an adult, I still love the ritual which includes the palms, Jesus on the donkey, and Hosanna from the crowds. Notice that I didn't say the long liturgy, at least not with kids. I now appreciate that I can better understand what this time is about.

A common thread to all the scriptures this Palm Sunday is **humiliation**. Humiliation hurt the servant in Isaiah, it hurt Jesus, it embarrassed his early followers, it played a part in the incarnation and our redemption.

In the times of Isaiah, Jesus and the early church, status was a far greater pillar of society than it is today. Hard to believe, right? But historians find evidence that status-consciousness was much more powerful in the culture of the ancient Mediterranean. It controlled people more thoroughly than we think it controls us in current society. Jesus turned this status conscious way of thinking completely upside down. In all his teachings he always said the last shall be first and consistently reached out to those on the margins of society. How can we as followers of Jesus recognize the virtue of humility in our daily lives?

I can relate to my own humility because as my husband so kindly reminds me, I can often be judgmental of others when I should be understanding of them. I have even used my knowledge of Jesus' behavior to be critical of others resulting in humiliation for them. (apologies to all my siblings!).

I think reflecting on Jesus' life and actions help me find the strength to accept myself as an imperfect person trying to do my best every day. I must give everyone the benefit of the doubt that they are trying to do their best as well. This idea of assuming the best in everyone is what is behind St. Ignatius's Presupposition:

From the Spiritual Exercises (22), "It should be presupposed that every good Christian ought to be more eager to put a good interpretation on a neighbor's statement than to condemn it. Further, if one cannot interpret it favorably, one should ask how the other means it. If the meaning is wrong, one should correct the person with love; if this is not enough, one should search out every appropriate means through which, by understanding the statement in a good way, it may be saved."

So, as we enter into the Holiest week of the Liturgical calendar we may not be willing yet to ask for humiliations just like the ones Jesus endured. But maybe we can ask for self-knowledge, and awareness about our intentions. Perhaps instead of nurturing my status to judge others I can learn from God's love for Jesus during his most shameful time to improve myself and my actions towards others. At this moment of our lives, during the health and racial pandemics, we are given the opportunity to recognize our fragility, our oneness and need for each other. May we continue to use the life of Jesus as a model of hope and inspiration being fully alive in our concern for others.

Personal Reflection Questions

Lent is a time of self-examination and renewal. Consider using the reflection prompts below to help further your contemplation and open your mind and heart during Holy Week:

- **How can we as followers of Jesus recognize the virtue of humility in our daily lives?**
- **Do others see the reflection of Jesus in my actions?**