

Homily: Sunday of the Passion  
Text: Mark 11:1-11

There are few things more exhilarating than being the object of hope for the masses. And there are few things more dangerous. In a very small way this was evident this past week when President Obama went to Europe. Seven months ago he was the darling of the continent, the one man who seemed able to change the world. Hundreds of thousands of people clamored to hear just one speech, and the mood then was electric. Now, as he returns, he bears all the weight of his political office, and a palpable increase of soberness has set in. The issues are more complicated and the problems are more stubborn than they had previously appeared. And already, after less than three months, some who were formerly giddy are wondering what happened. He isn't the star that many imagined him to be. He couldn't be. No one could.

For stars exist only in Hollywood, only in the unreal fiction of celluloid dreams, only when we can continually project on them powers that never meet up with the struggles of actual life. Such celebrity, though rampant in our time, is entirely frivolous, and when the people we have made into stars disappoint, the reaction can be swift and terrible. Our rapturous acclaim can descend quickly into ridicule and hatred – often because what we saw in them was not they themselves but merely the promise of our own wishes being fulfilled by someone else's labor. Thus they do not just fail; they fail us. So we feel justified in turning on them. Read a few pages of history. Choose any period you like. This will be one of the stories you will find.

And, in part, this is the story of this day. Long ago, Jesus rode into Jerusalem accompanied by the shouts and adulation of the crowds. Here was their hero, their savior, the one who, finally, at long last, would drive out the despised Romans and reestablish the Kingdom of Israel. This was their projection. This was their glee and their rapture. They did not see Jesus. They saw only their own prosperity. For all their singing, they did not love him. They were, rather, thrilled by the prospect that their own hopes were on the verge of fruition, arriving with him.

Jesus, however, had no intention of trying to be powerful on their behalf. God's function is not to grant our wishes, no matter how noble. What Jesus showed in the triumphant entry into the city was the difference between our rapturous fascinations and God's love. As the Gospels pointedly attest, soon enough, the people's adoration would turn to insult, mockery, and violence. This is what the powerful do when disappointed. They condemn. But Jesus had no interest in their plans or schemes, in our visions and our dreams. He, in love, saw us instead – not just the best of us, the dressed up finery of our fanciful ideals, but the whole of us, the way we are in all of our actions, sometimes – frequently -- inconsistent, irascible, self-centered, and vain. And seeing us so plainly, God chose to show just how deeply he loved us, by suffering our judgments no less than our praise, without offering correction, without objecting, without ever drawing back in resistance. Jesus rode into Jerusalem as Emmanuel: God with us, allowing us to be most definitely ourselves, so that, in turn, we might realize most definitely who God is.

Remembered from our perspective, Palm Sunday through Good Friday tells just one more story of tragedy – hopes dashed by a hero's failing. And if we're not careful, Easter only replays Palm Sunday again. Jesus, this time the superhero, arrives to give us what we want. This time for good.

But the real story of Palm Sunday isn't a tragedy. It's the sudden appearance of God's holiness within our world, within the gates of Jerusalem. Perceived from God's perspective, Palm Sunday through Good Friday is the unsurpassable fulfillment of love: God himself showing us the true nature of devotion, being with us all the way through to suffering us to the end. Power always works to eliminate its rivals. Yet here, God, chose to show how, in contrast, love does not let go of friends. I

f we see this deeply enough, then Easter is not about us or our dreams for ourselves. It's God's revelation to us of who he truly is, so we, at last, *may see him*. And it's that freedom, gained by God's unrelenting communion, that defeats death and opens our lives to his eternity – which we do not possess, but is shared with us.

In all that's remembered here, today, let us fix ourselves firmly in this disclosure of God's holiness.

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