

Our text for the sermon is going to add a few more verses to the Gospel lesson for today:

¹²The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, ¹³ took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: “Hosanna! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ The King of Israel!” ¹⁴ Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: ¹⁵ “Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt.” ¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.

¹⁷ Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. ¹⁸ For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. ¹⁹ The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, “You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!”

²⁰ Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. ²¹ Then they came to Philip, who was from

Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”²² Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus.²³ But Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.²⁴ Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.²⁵ He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.²⁶ If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.

²⁷ “Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour.²⁸ Father, glorify Your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, saying, “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.”²⁹ Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to Him.”³⁰ Jesus answered and said, “This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake.³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.³² And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”³³ This He said, signifying by what death He would die.

In this Palm Sunday Gospel, the Pharisees said to one another, **“We are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!”** The Pharisees were frustrated. They hated our Lord and were plotting to kill Him. They were also, by the way, plotting to kill Lazarus whom Jesus had just raised from the dead. The Pharisees had seen how the crowds went out to meet Jesus, shouting, **“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!”** Everyone wanted to see Jesus who had raised Lazarus from the dead. And this annoyed and frustrated the Pharisees who were so full of their own righteousness that they could not stand the grace of God that was revealed and given in Christ.

So, ironically enough, out of the mouths of the Pharisees comes a prophetic word. **“We are accomplishing nothing.”** That was most certainly true. They were accomplishing nothing by their works before God. They could do nothing to stop the mission of Christ. Jesus was firmly set upon His course to the cross. The world, the devil, and sinful flesh could accomplish nothing against the salvation that He was bringing.

The Pharisees also said, **“The world has gone after Him.”** That, too, was most certainly true. Not only the Jews who had gathered for the Feast of the Passover, but now even some Greeks who were there – they, too

wanted to see Jesus. ***“The world has gone after Him,”*** the world whose sins Jesus came to bear.

In Psalm 2, these words are written: ***“Why do the nations rage and the people plot a vain thing? ... He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; Yahweh shall hold them in derision. 5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: 6 “Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.”*** God has a sense of humor. He even puts words of prophecy into the mouths of His enemies! The Pharisees speak truth even though they do not understand it. There is nothing they can do. The whole world will be drawn to this Jesus. God the Father will establish Him as King on the holy hill of His cross. The Father sits on His heavenly throne, chuckling and laughing at those who are frustrated by His gracious will.

Philip and Andrew came to Jesus with a request from these Greeks: ***“We wish to see Jesus.”*** But our Lord gives an answer which makes no mention of the Greeks and gives no indication that He will have an audience with them. Rather, Jesus says something to indicate that soon He was going to die. For it was only through His death that the Greeks would see Him properly. Jesus says to Philip and Andrew, ***“The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.”***

Throughout the Gospel of John we are told that Jesus' hour had not yet come, beginning with His very first miracle at the wedding at Cana. But now the hour had indeed come for the Son of Man to be glorified. When our Lord speaks of His being glorified, He is speaking first not of His resurrection but of His suffering. That is the hour for which He had come into this world. It is the hour when the righteous anger of God against all sin will be shown for what it is. But it is also the hour that God's love will be shown for what it is. Strangely enough, the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, is glorified on the cross.

That is why Palm Sunday has an odd tension to it. That is why this day is a day of restrained joy. Jesus enters into Jerusalem as King; yet He rides not on a stallion but on a donkey colt. We join in with the people's shouts of "***Hosanna!***"; yet we realize that He has come in humility to die. This King's glory is to be lifted up in love for the world on the throne of the cross, to lay down His life in this world that we might be lifted up to heaven. Jesus displays His glory and majesty by being the Groom who will let nothing, not even death, stand in the way of rescuing and being with you, His bride, the Church.

Therefore, Jesus rides into the holy city on a beast of burden, an animal that carries heavy loads. For Jesus was to be like that donkey, as it

is written in Isaiah (53:4), **“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.”** Jesus’ soul was deeply troubled here, for all your burdens were placed upon His back. He hauled all of your trespasses and transgressions to that hill outside the city walls, where they were dumped and crushed and obliterated and buried forever in His crucifixion and death. Jesus took it upon Himself literally to make things right for you in the sight of your heavenly Father.

The only-begotten Son of God is glorified not by being exalted, but first by being humbled. The power of God for our salvation is shown in the weakness of the only innocent man to walk this earth being executed as a criminal. The wisdom of God is shown in the foolishness of having the one man who does not deserve to die dying in shame.

“We wish to see Jesus,” is the request. And the answer our Lord gives is to raise up His cross before us; for only there, on the cross, is He rightly and fully seen as the Savior. Nevertheless, this was not the answer that Philip and Andrew expected. This was an answer beyond their experience. Jesus came to do what the sinful mind of man does not expect; He came to crucify our experience in this fallen world. Jesus came to be that kernel of wheat which falls into the ground and dies so that the old might be done away with and a new creation might come forth. He is the

kernel of wheat that falls into the ground and dies so that all might be drawn to Him.

The “death” of a seed is what brings life to the garden. In much the same way Jesus’ death brings about life for you. Jesus chose not to remain a single seed. He entered into the Garden of Gethsemane, where He anguished over what was about to come upon Him. His sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood. Then, after being lifted up for our sins on the cross, Jesus was taken down to the earth, lifeless and limp. He was buried in a grave, planted in a tomb located in the midst of a garden.

However, like good seed sown in good earth, that is not the end of the story. Jesus sprouted forth to life on Easter morning. He produced a harvest of forgiveness and salvation for all who trust in Him. Through the planting of the one Seed, Jesus, many more seeds are produced, countless people who through Him are brought from darkness to light, from death to life. Only by first being planted in the depths of darkness and death does Jesus raise us up with Himself to light and life.

And here is what all of that means for your day-to-day life: Living in the way of Christ, you are to die to yourselves in this world in order that you may share with Him in His resurrection. Jesus said, **“The man who loves his life will lose it”** (Jn 12:25). Love is not always a good thing. The

Pharisees had love. They loved their own lives. The fallen nature of man loves to satisfy its own appetites. The love of money, the love of power, the love of glory in this world and the praise of men – hearts that are set on these things are dead to God. The sinful nature loves to have its own way and hates to suffer anything. This world is full of those who are literally loving themselves to death.

But, Jesus said, ***“The man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life”*** (Jn 12:25). Hate is not always a bad thing. To hate what is contrary to the will of our most gracious God is a holy hatred. For example, to hate abortion and ungodly marriages is such a holy hatred. Such hate is a gift of God. Psalm 97:10 says, ***“Yahweh loves those who hate evil; He preserves the lives of His saints; He delivers them from the hand of the wicked.”*** The saints of Yahweh are those who are freely given the righteousness of Christ through faith, those who rely not on their own goodness but on His alone. The wicked from whom the Lord preserves His saints are the devil, the world, and even our own sinful flesh. To hate the sin which still hangs around our necks is a blessing from God.

Our whole Christian life in this world is a constant return to our Holy Baptism where the Holy Spirit leads us to hate what God hates and to love what God loves. No one can go through this life without hating some things

and loving other things. The difference between life and death is in what we hate and what we love. The Pharisees loved their lives, they loved their acts of righteousness, and they hated our Lord and the righteousness He freely brought to this world. The Lord grant that we may hate our lives in this world and love Him who is our righteousness, life, and salvation.

Our Lord had many admirers. There were many who were fascinated by His words and they were eager to see the marvelous signs He performed. Perhaps these Greeks in the Gospel who asked to see Jesus were like that, people who would admire Jesus without really knowing or caring about why He had come.

So, to make matters clear, Jesus spoke of His cross. His death means the death of the sinner. His death means judgment on this world. His death means the driving out of the devil, who is the prince of this world. Those who would follow Jesus must follow Him to the cross. They must die with Him and be raised with Him. They must die to this life and be raised to a new life in Him.

“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” And our Lord replies, “I’ll see you at Calvary,” for that is where you are to look. And where is it that you may behold Christ the crucified? Right here in the Sacrament of the Altar. The Lord who came in His flesh and blood to Jerusalem comes also now to you

in His flesh and blood to give you the forgiveness of sins which He purchased on the cross. He “saddles” the bread and wine and rides right to where you are, that He might unite you to Himself in holy love and fill you with His life.

That is why, before receiving the Sacrament today, you sing some of the very same words that were shouted to Jesus on the first Palm Sunday, ***“Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”***

It is Christ’s glory and His joy to come into the holy city to give His life for you in order that you may live.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.