



Bringing Home the Word

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord (B)

March 24, 2024

Empty Praise? No!

Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

How could anyone think that the joyous cry “Hosanna!” would be viewed as empty praise? Though the word has come down to us from the Greek Gospels, it probably has Hebrew roots as a form of the verb “to save” (see Psalm 118:25). Thus, it is more than an exuberant cry; it is a plea for salvation. How could this possibly be empty praise? The answer to that question is found in human fickleness. So often, we—not simply the people of Jerusalem, but all of humanity—wholeheartedly offer someone our support, only to turn

our backs on that person when the going gets tough. We know from experience how this works.

This is precisely what today’s readings describe. The Gospel reading for the procession with palms describes an enthusiastic group of people showing Jesus great respect and crying out, “Hosanna!” Later we hear, “Crucify him!” Were these the same people? Does it matter? Presumably these were people who were in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, the feast of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Now they are caught in another oppressive political system—Roman occupation. Are these heartless people? Or are they like us, often afraid to take an unpopular stand, lest we lose face or, even worse, suffer serious consequences? And so, Jesus stands alone before those who have planned to silence him. Might he have considered the earlier “Hosanna” empty praise? Probably not. Jesus does not hold our fickleness against us. †

***Hosanna is more than
an exuberant cry;
it is a plea for salvation.***



Sunday Readings

Mark 11:1–10 or John 12:12–16

Those preceding him as well as those following kept crying out: “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Isaiah 50:4–7; Philippians 2:6–11

Rather, he emptied himself... becoming obedient to...death, even death on a cross.

Mark 14:1—15:47 or 15:1–39

[Jesus prayed,] “Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will.”

A Word from Pope Francis

Jesus, in his abandonment, asks us to open our eyes and hearts to all who find themselves abandoned.... Let us ask for the grace to see and acknowledge the Lord who continues to cry out in them. May we not allow his voice to go unheard amid the deafening silence of indifference.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- If you have failed to support someone, can you ask them to forgive you?
- Can you forgive someone who has betrayed you?

Hosanna!

Rev. Paul Turner

Our parish maintenance man can fix anything. He analyzes problems and finds creative, inexpensive solutions. The church building is more than ninety years old, so a lot of things need repair. Over the decades, in a parish that has always struggled to pay its bills, our guy has plenty to do. From time to time, I remember to tell him that he does good work. I hope it's helpful feedback, but it's also a cry for help.

The word *Hosanna* works just that way. It's a word we sing at every Mass during the Sanctus. The words "in the highest" come right after it. Many think that "Hosanna" is another way of saying "Praise God," as in "Praise God in the highest." But "Hosanna" doesn't mean that. Alleluia means "Praise God." Hosanna means something like "save us."



It comes from the same Aramaic word that gives us the word Jesus, a name that means "Savior."

When the crowds gathered in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to greet Jesus upon his entry, they shouted

out this word. They weren't merely communicating how wonderful they thought Jesus was. They were also telling him how needy they were. They needed a savior.

We all do. Sometimes the savior is the guy who can repair the plumbing and install new lights. But we also need someone who can repair what's broken inside us. We carry sin and shame, sadness and misbehavior, faults and flaws. So we cry out to God, who can offer us forgiveness and a new start.

The people who shouted "Hosanna" turned against Jesus a few days later. He surely remembered the real meaning of that word as he hung upon the cross. He did not abandon them. He saved them. We praise him. We need him. He is our Savior. †

Source: *Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter, 2015*

Wisdom from Catholic UPDATE

From "Agony in the Garden: Understanding the Passion of Jesus"
by Ronald Rolheiser.

At the time of Jesus, *agonia* was a technical term for what athletes did when warming up for the Olympic Games. During that warm-up, the Greek athletes would produce a sweat that would warm up their muscles and ready them for combat. That sweat, that lather, was called their *agonia*. Luke tells us that Jesus does an *agonia* to get ready for his passion. In essence, Luke is saying, we don't move from day-to-day life to dying on a cross without some preparation. The Agony in the Garden is the warm-up, the readying, the *agonia* for the passion that follows. †

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*So that this Holy Week we
may love those who hurt us,
make peace, and do our part
in the building of the Kingdom,
we pray—
Lord, let us be like you.*

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 25–30

Monday of Holy Week:

Is 42:1–7 / Jn 12:1–11

Tuesday of Holy Week:

Is 49:1–6 / Jn 13:21–33, 36–38

Wednesday of Holy Week:

Is 50:4–9a / Mt 26:14–25

Holy Thursday: Ex 12:1–8, 11–14 / 1 Cor 11:23–26 / Jn 13:1–15

Good Friday: Is 52:13–53:12 / Heb 4:14–16; 5:7–9 / Jn 18:1–19:42

Holy Saturday: Gn 1:1–2:2 or 1:1, 26–31a / Gn 22:1–18 or 22:1–2, 9a, 10–13, 15–18 / Ex 14:15–15:1 / Is 54:5–14 / Is 55:1–11 / Bar 3:9–15, 32–4:4 / Ez 36:16–17a, 18–28 / Rom 6:3–11 / Mk 16:1–7

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