

## **Palm Sunday**

### **Principal Service readings**

#### ***Liturgy of the Palms***

Matthew 21.1-11                    The Messiah enters Jerusalem

Psalms 118.1-2, 19-29 [or 118.19-24]    Entry to Jerusalem

#### ***Liturgy of the Passion***

Isaiah 50.4-9a                    The third song of the servant

Psalms 31.9-16 [or 31.9-18]    I take refuge in the Lord

Philippians 2.5-11                Christ emptied himself

Matthew 26.14 – 27.66 or 27.11-54    The Passion of Jesus

### **Opening Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### **Gospel Reading**

#### **Jesus is brought to Pilate, then crucified**

<sup>11</sup>Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus said, 'You say so.' <sup>12</sup>But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. <sup>13</sup>Then Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?' <sup>14</sup>But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

<sup>15</sup>Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. <sup>16</sup>At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. <sup>17</sup>So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?' <sup>18</sup>For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. <sup>19</sup>While he was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent word to him, 'Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.' <sup>20</sup>Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. <sup>21</sup>The governor again said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.' <sup>22</sup>Pilate said to them, 'Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' All of them said, 'Let him

be crucified!’<sup>23</sup> Then he asked, ‘Why, what evil has he done?’ But they shouted all the more, ‘Let him be crucified!’

<sup>24</sup>So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.’<sup>25</sup> Then the people as a whole answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’<sup>26</sup> So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

<sup>27</sup>Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor’s headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him.<sup>28</sup> They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,<sup>29</sup> and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’<sup>30</sup> They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head.<sup>31</sup> After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

<sup>32</sup>As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.<sup>33</sup> And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull),<sup>34</sup> they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.<sup>35</sup> And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots;<sup>36</sup> then they sat down there and kept watch over him.<sup>37</sup> Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, ‘This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.’

<sup>38</sup>Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.<sup>39</sup> Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying,<sup>40</sup> ‘You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.’<sup>41</sup> In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying,<sup>42</sup> ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him.’<sup>43</sup> He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, “I am God’s Son.”<sup>44</sup> The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

<sup>45</sup>From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.<sup>46</sup> And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’<sup>47</sup> When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, ‘This man is calling for Elijah.’<sup>48</sup> At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink.<sup>49</sup> But the others said, ‘Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.’<sup>50</sup> Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.<sup>51</sup> At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were

split. <sup>52</sup>The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. <sup>53</sup>After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. <sup>54</sup>Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

Matthew 27.11-54 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

## Comments and Questions

Palm Sunday is a commemoration of highs and lows. We enter church in high spirits, singing 'Hosanna', but only a few minutes later we are crying out together, 'Let him be crucified'. This juxtaposition indicates the fickleness of human beings, not only during the events of Holy Week, but quite regularly. We can see in the reading themes of betrayal, power, humility, trust. Judas betrayed Jesus, Peter denied knowing him. The disciples who had not long before expressed such devotion slipped away, and Jesus was left to die alone, mocked by the crowds and even by those crucified with him. There is a mob mentality at work, which should make us think about what happens today. Might we join in with this? The crowd, humanity itself, is eager to believe the worst, and to put God to the test. But God's ways are not our ways. He will vindicate Jesus not by bringing him down from the cross but by raising him from the dead. When faced with deceit, betrayal and violence the response God asks of us is faith. God has another way, and we are invited to enter into this new way of life.

## Quotations

### 1

When Christ entered into Jerusalem the people spread garments in the way: when he enters into our hearts, we pull off our own righteousness, and not only lay it under Christ's feet but even trample upon it ourselves.

Augustus Toplady, 1740–1778

### 2

When Jesus entered Jerusalem the people spread their clothes in the way and strewed branches before Him in order to do Him honour. Jesus rode upon an ass, according to the word of the prophet. His feet

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<sup>1</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

did not touch the road which was decorated in His honour. It was the ass which trod upon the garments and the branches. But the ass would have been very foolish to have been uplifted on that account; for the road really was not decked in its honour! It would be just as foolish if those who bear Christ to men were to think anything of themselves because of what men do to them for the sake of Jesus.

Sadhu Sundar Singh, 1889–1929

## **Related topics**

*For further study:*

the cross; paschal mystery; redemptive suffering; salvation

## **Closing Prayer**

To the weary and despairing, O God,  
you send your word of deliverance  
in Jesus, your servant and your Son.

As we begin this holiest of weeks,  
draw us close to Christ  
and let his mind be in us,  
that in his obedience we may find  
the strength to pursue your purpose  
of new life and freedom for all.

We ask this through Jesus Christ,  
who is one with you and the Holy Spirit,  
now and for ever.

Celebrating the Christian Year, v.2 · Liturgy of the Passion<sup>2</sup>