

## Palm Sunday 2024

It is good to begin Holy Week together on our feet, walking together, holding our palms, recalling Jesus' entry into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday. "*Hosanna*" we cried, "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*"

But I have just come back from Rome, where ancient mosaics also show processions of palms. But not Palm Sunday. Rather the procession of the martyrs into the heavenly Jerusalem where their palms are the sign of their courage and strength, their crowns a symbol of their victory.

These are contrasting images, because it is easy to be there with those Palm Sunday crowds when the going is good. It is easy to cry 'Hosanna' with the cheering crowds greeting their King as he enters Jerusalem, but can we stay with him, as the martyrs did, when the going gets tough. That is a persistent question that comes to the fore in our passion reading. Will we stay with Jesus through thick and thin, whatever the cost?

Again and again, Jesus asks the question. Can we drink the cup that he will drink, the cup of suffering and sacrifice? Can we walk the road that he will take, the road that leads to Calvary? As he carries his cross will we lose faith, will we fall away, will we deny him? Like Peter, like Judas, like the disciples.

Let's be honest, most of us recoil from what is hard. What does walking towards the Cross look like for you and me today? It means not recoiling from what is hard, when I would rather put myself first. It means walking towards those in need, when it is easier to be wrapped in my selfish pursuits. It is about love that is patient and generous. It is about sticking with people in their need. Speaking up about injustice, standing up for the truth.

Most of us could never hold the martyrs' palms because we fall short of that heroic, selfless love that the martyr Jesus and his heroic saintly followers displayed.

But still there is hope for us because the disciples ran away but Jesus still loved them, they fled from the scene, but he met with them again and said: get up, and follow me. He gave himself up in love on the Cross not because we are good, but he is God, and loves us to the end.

Amongst all the figures in St Mark's Passion story, one stood out for me this year:  
The woman who anointed his feet.

Jesus praises the extravagant act of this woman who anoints him with costly, fragrant ointment because he sees it as an extraordinary act of love. Love is not reasonable or restrained. Love gives fully, completely, lavishly. We don't even know her name. But in sharp contrast to those plotting around him and the disciples running away, she is there showing what love is. We don't even know her name, but Jesus says: *"I tell you solemnly, wherever throughout all the world the Good News is proclaimed, what she has done will be told also, in remembrance of her."* What extraordinary words.

Jesus can speak in this way because throughout his ministry he had spoken of the extravagant, even scandalous, love of God. Jesus praises the woman who anoints him because her loving act of devotion anticipates his outpouring of love on the Cross. He will love us to the end with a love that is costly and extravagant, scandalous, and lavish, wearing a crown that is full of thorns.

You and I may never with the martyrs' palm and the martyrs' crown. But we are still invited to follow the Lord despite our failures. Through small, quiet act of selfless love we aspire to show that Jesus is the King we serve, and try to love like him, who loved us unto death.