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Palm Sunday is unique among Sunday liturgies in that we have heard this morning the Palm Gospel, St. Matthew's account of that first Palm Sunday, and the Passion Gospel from St. Matthew. We expect the Gospel to be only about Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the waving of palm branches and the singing of *Hosanna, Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord*. And yet our Palm Sunday begins almost immediately with this account of the Gospel from St. Matthew, the distribution of the blessed palms, and then we begin to look toward the Cross and the Empty Tomb in the coming days at the end of Holy Week.

There are few more details about that first Palm Sunday in St. Mark's and St. Luke's Gospels. In St. Mark's Gospel we find that the disciples were indeed asked by the owners, *why loose ye the colt?* To which they answer as the Lord instructed them, saying, *the Lord hath need of them*. In St. Luke's Gospel we find that the Pharisees stood watching that first Palm Sunday procession, and they called out to Jesus commanding Him *Master, rebuke thy disciples*. To which Jesus said, *I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out*. St. Matthews tells us that when the procession makes it way into Jerusalem, *the whole city was moved, saying Who is this? And the multitude said, this is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee*. With all of this in mind, let us reflect this morning on what we have just done. We have done what many of us have always done on Palm Sunday. We have blessed and distributed palms, we have sung *All glory, laud and honor*, and processed around the church yard with our palms, which we will then take home. The question for us this morning is, is this all just ritual, reenactment, or memorial? Or have we somehow spiritually and mysteriously joined with that multitude on the first Palm Sunday and sung Hosanna with them to the Lord?

That of course is the goal of all of Masses and especially of our Holy Week liturgies. They are not intended to be thought of as just another chore, another obligation to make on a busy weekday. And yet, imagine what you would do if you were somehow transported to that very day, that very moment when Jesus entered Jerusalem. Could you keep from weeping long enough to wave palm branches and sing Hosanna? Could you even bear to look upon Him who rides towards Jerusalem to be crucified for your salvation? This is what Holy Week is supposed to accomplish for us. This is what we should keep in mind as we approach our Holy Week services. Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil, and Easter Day, with their detailed and often complicated liturgies are not supposed to be seen as empty ritual, nor are they memorials or reenactments, they are invitations to come and join Jesus. Come sit at the table with Him at His Last Supper in the Upper Room, follow Him as He goes to die on Calvary, stand beneath the cross with St. John and His Mother, and go early to the Tomb with Mary Magdalene and meet the resurrected Lord.

In these late and dangerous days, busy with nothing of much significance, as the years roll on in what the world calls progress and efficiency, it becomes harder to keep Holy Week. How many distractions we face, and yet the church invites us to examine ourselves. A great English priest once observed, *Our spirit, left to itself, is too like that of the rich young man who having, as he thought, done all his duty to his neighbor from his youth up, asked of our Lord without fear "What lack I yet?" This, we have reason to think, is the disposition of our countrymen. They always want something solid, and dislike what seems fanciful and unreal...even in religious and spiritual things, and therefore devotion properly so called: worshipping God, lifting up their hearts to Him in public and in private, making leisure for prayer and holy and penitential exercises, keeping holy days... [either] of humiliation or of festival joy. All these things we are apt to think [less] of,*

*because we do not perceive...that outward fruit...which we are accustomed to look for in everything.*

But just as every eye saw the Lord as He made His way down the road from Bethphage overlooking the city of Jerusalem and entered the city with great fanfare and the songs of children, so He stands before us this week. He entered Jerusalem in peace, and then in the very same chapter of the Palm Gospel which we heard this morning we find that Jesus dismounts the donkey and goes right into the Temple and casts out the money changers and overthrows their tables. Make no mistake, the events of that first Palm Sunday were not random, or spur of the moment. Jesus is announcing to all of Jerusalem that He is the Messiah and He has come to set all things right. Jesus enters Jerusalem and demands a response, and so He demands a response from us. We are reminded this week: *Be not, then, slothful on this holy and blessed week. Make haste to be reconciled, you who are out of charity. Deny yourselves, you who live at your ease. Recollect yourselves, you who are careless in your prayers, and remember your savior.* This Holy Week we have another opportunity to unite our lives to the life of Christ, to meet Him in a new and profound way in the coming days, but may we not be among that crowd who on this day sang Hosanna, and yet on Good Friday cried *Crucify Him! Give us Barrabas!*

St. Andrew of Crete writes, *Let us run to accompany him as he hastens toward his passion, and imitate those who met him then, not by covering his path with garments, olive branches or palms, but by doing all we can to prostrate ourselves before him by being humble and by trying to live as he would wish. Then we shall be able to receive the Word at His coming, and God, whom no limits can contain, will be within us. Let our souls take the place of the welcoming branches as we join today in the children's holy song: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" lest the rocks cry out. Amen.*