

Palm Sunday (C)

Gospel text (Lk 22,14—23,56): When the hour came, Jesus took his place at table and the apostles with him. And he said to them, «I was eager to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for, I tell you, I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God». Then they passed him a cup and when He had given thanks he said, «Take this and share it among yourselves: for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes».

Jesus also took bread, and after giving thanks, He broke it and gave it to them saying, «This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me». And He did the same with the cup after eating, «This cup is the new covenant, sealed in my blood which is poured out for you. Yet the hand of the traitor is with me on the table. Know that the Son of Man is going the way marked out for him. But alas for that one who betrays him!».

They began to ask one another which of them could do such a thing. They also began to argue among themselves which of them should be considered the most important. And Jesus said, «The kings of the pagan nations rule over them as lords, and the most hard-hearted rulers claim the title, ‘Gracious Lord’. But not so with you; let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is the greatest, he who sits at the table or he who serves? He who is seated, isn't it? Yet I am among you as the one who serves. You are the ones who have been with me and stood by me through my troubles; because of this, just as the kingship has been given to me by my Father, so I give it to you. You will eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit

on thrones and govern the twelve tribes of Israel.

»Simon, Simon, Satan has demanded to sift you like grain, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have recovered you shall strengthen your brothers». Then Peter said, «Lord, with you I am ready to go even to prison and death». But Jesus replied, «I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day before you have denied three times that you know me».

Jesus also said to them, «When I sent you without purse or bag or sandals, were you short of anything?». They answered, «No». And Jesus said to them, «But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and a bag as well. And if anyone is without a sword, let him sell his cloak to buy one. For Scriptures says: ‘He was numbered among criminals’. These words had to be fulfilled in me, and now everything written about me is taking place. Then they said, «See, Lord, here are two swords», but he answered, «That is enough».

After this Jesus left to go as usual to Mount Olives and the disciples followed him. When He came to the place, He told them, «Pray that you may not be put to the test». Then He went a little further, about a stone's throw, and kneeling down He prayed, «Father, if it is your will, remove this cup from me; still not my will but yours be done». And an angel from heaven appeared to give him strength. As He was in agony, He prayed even more earnestly and great drops of blood formed like sweat and fell to the ground. When He rose from prayer, He went to his disciples but found them worn out with grief, and asleep. And He said to them, «Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you may not be put to the test».

Jesus was still speaking when a group appeared and the man

named Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, and Jesus said to him, «Did you need this kiss to betray the Son of Man?». Those with Jesus seeing what would happen, said to him, «Master, shall we use the sword?». And one of them struck the High Priest's servant and cut off his right ear. But Jesus stopped him, «No more of this». He touched the man's ear and healed him. Then Jesus spoke to those coming against him, the chief priests, officers of the Temple and elders and he said to them, «Did you really set out against a robber? Do you need swords and clubs to arrest me? Day after day I was among you teaching in the Temple and you did not arrest me. But this is the hour of the power of darkness; this is your hour».

Then they seized him and took him away, bringing him to the High Priest's house. Peter followed at a distance. A fire was kindled in the middle of the courtyard where people gathered, and Peter sat among them. A maidservant noticed him. Looking at him intently in the light of the fire, she exclaimed, «This man also was with him!». But he denied it, saying, «Woman, I do not know him». A little later someone who saw him said, «You are also one of them!». Peter replied, «My friend, I am not!». After about an hour another asserted, «Surely this man was with him, for he is a Galilean». Again Peter denied, «My friend, I don't know what you are talking about». He had not finished saying this when a cock crowed. The Lord turned around and looked at Peter and he remembered the word that the Lord had spoken, «Before the cock crows today you will have denied me three times». Peter went outside, weeping bitterly.

Meanwhile the guards were mocking and beating Jesus. They blindfolded him, struck him and then asked, «Who hit you? Tell us,

prophet». And they hurled many other insulting words at him.

At daybreak, the council of the elders of the people, among whom were the chief priests and the scribes, assembled again. Then they had Jesus brought before them, and they began questioning him: «Tell us, are you the Christ?». Jesus replied, «You will not believe if I tell you, and neither will you answer if I ask you. Yet from now on the Son of Man will have his seat at the right hand of the Mighty God». In chorus they asked, «So you are the Son of God?». And Jesus said to them, «You are right, I am». Then they said, «What need have we of witnesses? We have heard it from his own lips».

The whole council rose and brought Jesus to Pilate. They gave their accusation: «We found this man subverting our nation, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar, and claiming to be Christ the king». Pilate asked Jesus, «Are you the King of the Jews?». Jesus replied, «You said so». Turning to the chief priests and the crowd, Pilate said, «I find no basis for a case against this man». But they insisted, «All the country of the Jews is being stirred up with his teaching. He began in Galilee and now He has come all the way here». When Pilate heard this, he asked if the man was a Galilean. Finding the accused to come under Herod's jurisdiction, Pilate sent Jesus over to Herod who happened to be in Jerusalem at that time.

Herod was delighted to have Jesus before him now; for a long time he had wanted to see him because of the reports about him, and he was hoping to see Jesus work some miracle. He piled up question upon question, but got no reply from Jesus. All the while the chief priests and the scribes remained standing there, vehemently pressing their accusations. Finally, Herod ridiculed him and with his guards mocked him. And when he had put a rich cloak on him,

he sent him back to Pilate. Pilate and Herod who were enemies before, became friends from that day.

Pilate then called together the chief priests and the elders before all the people, and said to them, «You have brought this man before me and accused him of subversion. In your presence I have examined him and found no basis for your charges. And neither has Herod, for he sent him back to me. It is quite clear that this man has done nothing that deserves a death sentence. I will therefore have him scourged and then release him». On the Passover Pilate had to release a prisoner. Howling as one man, they protested: «No! Away with this man! Release Barabbas instead». This man had been thrown into prison for an uprising in the city and for murder. Since Pilate wanted to release Jesus, he appealed to the crowd once more, but they shouted back, «To the cross with him! To the cross!». A third time Pilate said to them, «Why, what evil has he done? Since no crime deserving death has been proved, I shall have him scourged and let him go». But they went on shouting and demanding that Jesus be crucified, and their shouts grew louder. So Pilate decided to pass the sentence they demanded. He released the man they asked for, the one who was in prison for rebellion and murder, and he delivered Jesus in accordance with their wishes.

When they led Jesus away, they seized Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the fields, and laid the cross on him, to carry it behind Jesus. A large crowd of people followed him; among them were women beating their breast and wailing for him, but Jesus turned to them and said, «Women of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, weep rather for yourselves and for your children. For the days are coming when people will say: ‘Happy are the women without child! Happy are those who have not given birth or nursed a child!’. And

they will say to the mountains: ‘Fall on us!’. And to the hills: ‘Cover us!’. For if this is the lot of the green wood, what will happen to the dry?».

Along with Jesus, two criminals also were led out to be executed. There at the place called “The Skull” He was crucified together with the criminals, one on his right and another on his left. Jesus said, «Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do». And the guards cast lots to divide his clothes among themselves. The people stood by watching. As for the rulers, they jeered at him, saying to one another, «Let the man who saved others now save himself, for he is the Messiah, the chosen one of God!». The soldiers also mocked him and when they drew near to offer him bitter wine, they said, «So you are the king of the Jews? Free yourself!». For above him was an inscription which read, «This is the King of the Jews».

One of the criminals hanging with Jesus insulted him, «So you are the Messiah? Save yourself and us as well!». But the other rebuked him, saying, «Have you no fear of God, you who received the same sentence as He did? For us it is just: this is payment for what we have done. But this man has done nothing wrong». And he said, «Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom». Jesus replied, «Truly, you will be with me today in paradise».

It was now about noon. The sun was hidden and darkness came over the whole land until mid-afternoon; and at that time the curtain of the Sanctuary was torn in two. Then Jesus gave a loud cry, «Father, into your hands I commend my spirit». And saying that, He gave up his spirit.

The captain on seeing what had happened, acknowledged the hand

of God. He said, «Surely this was an upright man». And all the people who had gathered to watch the spectacle, as soon as they saw what had happened went home beating their breasts. Only those who knew Jesus stood at a distance, especially the women who had followed him from Galilee; they witnessed all this.

Then intervened a member of the Jewish supreme council, a good and righteous man named Joseph from the Judean town of Arimathea. He had not agreed with the decision and action of his fellow members, for he lived uprightly in the hope of seeing the kingdom of God. He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. He then took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth and laid it in a yet unused tomb cut out of a rock. It was Preparation Day and the star which marks the beginning of the Sabbath was shining. So the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph to see the tomb and how his body was being placed. And returning home, they prepared perfumes and ointments.

«Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do»

Fr. Josep M^a MASSANA i Mola OFM
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Today, we read the narrative of the Passion after saint Luke. Going by this evangelist, Jesus entering Jerusalem to a joyful palm parade and the passion narrative are mutually related even though the first part may sound exultant while the second one rather sounds humiliating.

Jesus enters Jerusalem as a messianic king, humble, peaceful, with a servant's attitude, not as temporal king using and abusing his power. The cross is the throne where He reigns from (He is not missing the royal crown!), by loving and forgiving. Luke's Gospel can, indeed, be summarized by saying it reveals Jesus' love made evident by his all encompassing mercy and forgiveness.

Jesus' mercy and forgiveness are certainly shown throughout Jesus' life, but more evidently upon His crucifixion. How meaningful are the three words we can today hear at the Cross, from Jesus' lips!

—He loves and forgives even his executioners: «Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do» (Lk 23:34).

—To the thief at his right, who asked Jesus to remember him for good in his Kingdom, Jesus grants forgiveness and salvation: «To day you shall be with me in paradise» (Lk 23:43).

—Jesus mostly forgives and loves us the in the supreme moment of his submission when He cries out: «Father, into your hands I commit my spirit» (Lk 23:46).

This is the Master's last lesson at the Cross: mercy and forgiveness, fruits of love. But forgiving is so difficult for us! And yet, if we try the experience of Jesus' love that excuses us, forgive us and save us, it will not be so difficult for us to look at the others with a tenderness that forgives with love and absolve without any meanness.

Saint Francis expresses it in his Canticle of the Creatures: «Praised be You, my Lord, through those who grant pardon for love of You!».

«Blessed is he who comes as king in the name of the Lord (Lk 19:38)»

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Today, the Holy Mass starts with the palms blessing and the procession to go into the temple. Thus, Palm Sunday evokes the “triumphal” entrance of Christ the King in the Holy City, shortly before his Passion. It is his last and final ascent to Jerusalem: this ascent which will culminate in the Cross. A few days before, the Master had resurrected Lazarus and in the city there was a great expectation.

Today Jesus is presented in his capacity as a King. This time, He does permit people to acclaim Him as a King. Good Friday will confirm his royal condition before Ponce Pilate, the highest civil authority of the place. But his kingdom is not of this world. He pointed it out to the governor, and this is how He today explains it to us.

He is, indeed, the King of the indigent: He arrives «riding on an ass», as the prophet Zechariah had announced (Zech 9:9). «He did not arrive in an ostentatious royal carriage or on horseback like the great figures of the world, but on a borrowed donkey» (Benedict XVI). And this is because God always acted smoothly: when He was born in this world (a stable, a manger, some diapers); when he “left” this world (a donkey, a cross, a sepulcher). Everything very daintily as if to avoid worrying us or troubling our liberty.

With this King «He shall proclaim peace to the nations» and «the warrior’s bows shall be banished» (Zech 9:10). Yes, Christ will transform the cross in a “broken bow”: the Cross will not be anymore an instrument of torture, of scoff and slaying, but a throne where to reign from by giving life to all others.

Finally, the crowds met Him by acclaiming Him: «Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord» (Lk 19:38). That day there were a few thousands; in the 21st century there are many millions of voices that «from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of earth» (Zech 9:10) sing it in the "Sanctus" of the Mass: «Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest».