

Collect and Readings for Worship at Home

Sunday 24th March - Palm Sunday

Collect:

Almighty and everlasting God,
who in your tender love towards the human race
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
to take upon him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross:
grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen

Readings:

First Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Gospel: Mark 11:1-11 - Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately." They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

'Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Reflection:

What does the idea of a king offer? Leadership? Just symbolic leadership? Or something more? What do you think people were expecting from the one who came, 'in the name of the Lord'? What did the name of his ancestor David add, I wonder? Glamour? Charisma? The mantle of a kind of 'superman' if you think of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17), or the romance of a kind of Cinderella fantasy if you focus on the choice of the youngest and least regarded brother, the shepherd boy, as king (1 Samuel 16)? A poet who gloriously lamented the death of his friend, Jonathan (2 Samuel 1; 17)? A warrior king who made Israel great? If there was also scandal (2 Samuel 11:14), and tragedy (2 Samuel 18; 33), they perhaps weren't coming to mind on that day! But overall, in David, we have the picture of a many-faceted but undoubtedly great man who served his people well. Does this picture help us at all to understand Jesus as king?

The UK got a new king last year, and the transition from the late Queen Elizabeth II to King Charles III has provoked some discussion of the acceptability of kingship in the modern world. It would probably be fair to say that we are happier with humility, romance and peaceable arts than with battle prowess, ambition, or a colourful past! Perhaps the essentials of Jesus as servant king of his people, humble on a donkey, acclaimed with peaceable palms, not the weapons of war, have gradually rubbed off on earthly monarchs down the years as they internalise the meaning of their anointing as servants of God and a nation. Modern British constitutional monarchy, crystallised in the late Queen, has been displayed in service, tact, self-restraint, concern for suffering, and the sponsorship of good causes and peace between nations.

But surely this is not enough to imagine the kind of king Jesus is? There is 'soft power' in King Jesus, certainly. Seemingly the sheer appeal of his personality brought people out to line the roads and shout, 'Hosanna'! But there was hard power, too, principally seen later when he drives the merchants out of the Temple but hinted at even on Palm Sunday. He gives his orders, and the disciples carry them out. With everything else, calm, certain, dignified – even on a donkey – he has the qualities of a good commanding officer.

In the end, there is no possible full comparison for Jesus' version of kingship. He shows both the compassion that wills an end, and wins hearts, and the strength of purpose that achieves it, by force if necessary. But he also had that perfection of motive, which meant that neither hard power, nor soft power, was ever used for selfish purposes. And that, none of us, king or commoner, will ever achieve. But, strengthened by the grace that God alone gives, we can go on trying in our imperfect ways to follow our utterly selfless divine example.

Reflection from Roots