

Palm Sunday, April 14, 2019

This weekend we celebrate Palm Sunday, which commemorates Jesus' jubilant entry into Jerusalem. But our celebration is short lived, for our readings from Holy Scripture do not end with Jesus' arrival in this holy city. Rather, this sacred journey that begins with a triumphal ride on streets carpeted with palm leaves takes an abrupt turn, leaving us stunned as Christ's passion unfolds before our very eyes. Our joy suddenly collapses into despair.

So, savor the brief feeling of euphoria, triumph and joy we experience as we wave our palms this weekend, for the celebration will give way quickly to the greatest sadness and the greatest injustice known in human history, brought to a climax in the shameful death of Christ on the cross.

Yet this should have come as no surprise to anyone, for Christ had predicted the course that his journey would take. He knew what was coming; and he met his destiny full-on even though he could have retreated, as indeed he was advised to do by friends; or he could have stood his ground and fought to reverse events, as we know all too well was within his power. But he didn't do either of these things. Instead, with true humility and obedience, he accepted his fate.

C. S. Lewis once wrote in a letter: "God could, had he been pleased, have been incarnate in a man of iron nerves. Of his great humility he chose to be incarnate in a man of delicate sensibilities who wept at the grave of Lazarus and sweated blood at Gethsemane."

God chose to be vulnerable.

Jesus understood his destiny and what would unfold in his final journey, one, ironically and tragically, that had begun with this giddy celebration as he rode into Jerusalem, cheered on by the crowd that would all too soon greet him with jeers and condemn him to death.

Peace, Michael+

Lent 5: April 7, 2014

Nard is an aromatic amber-colored essential oil derived from a flowering plant that grows in the Himalayas of Nepal, China, and India. A rare and precious commodity, it has since ancient times served as a perfume, a seasoning for food, a medicine, and as an ingredient in the incense reserved for religious rituals. It was especially prized in the Ancient Near East as a luxury item reserved for the most special of occasions.

It was Nard - a whole pound of it - which Mary of Bethany used to anoint Jesus' feet in this week's gospel lesson. However, according to Judas, her act of devotion was s a shameful waste, causing his anger and indignation to rise swiftly. He condemned Mary, accusing her of extravagance and self-indulgent excess. "How much good could have been done in aid of the poor with the money 'wasted' on the nard," he argued?

But was not our savior himself poor? After all, he was born into poverty, lived his adult life on the margins of society and died penniless. It is important for us as followers of Christ to remember that Christ would die a poor man, so that we could all be rich. Judas did not appreciate that Mary's act was far from an affront to the poor but rather one that symbolically honored the most marginalized in society. So, her anointing of Jesus with expensive perfume was a selfless act of generosity and an extravagant gift to the poor.

Mary's devotion is inspiring for it serves as a reminder to us that despite all of the cultural pressures that we are under to think of our lives from the perspective of scarcity, Christ calls us to see the abundance of life and to give generously, extravagantly - in our worship life, our prayer life, our stewardship of Christ's church, and in our acts of compassion, of charity, and of love.

Peace, Michael +