

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

How fickle is the human heart! I'll say it again, "How fickle is the human heart!" No one knew this better than Jesus. He knew exactly what he was doing when he entered Jerusalem. He knew the passions he would stir by this entrance into Jerusalem.

This is obvious that when he sent his disciples ahead to procure the donkey and her colt, he was deliberately fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah (9:9) "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." In this Gospel, St. Matthew emphasizes this connection when he notes that there were two donkeys, not one.

Think about that for a moment. After three years of telling people not to tell anyone who he was, Jesus is now deliberately drawing attention to himself. By this action, he is publicly proclaiming himself to every Jew familiar with the Word of God that he is King of Israel, the long-awaited Messiah.

The people understood! That's why they shouted, "Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David! That's why they laid palm branches and their cloaks on the ground before him! In the public mind they were greeting their King and Messiah.

The molders of public opinion could not tolerate that. The Sanhedrin certainly could not allow him to assert himself as Messiah. They would lose all their power. The Roman leaders could not allow him to be seen as king. That would make him a rival to Caesar. And so they conspired to turn the hearts of the people against him. And it was so easy!

In less than a week, the same ones who shouted, "Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David!" would be shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

In this too, Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. In his own person, he was displaying for all the world to see how deeply imbedded in the human heart, there is evil, which can be spewed out with the least provocation.

This innocent Son of God, who never hurt anyone, whose every action was guided by love and compassion for the least and the lowliest; this innocent Son of God is hung on a tree with nails driven into his hands and feet and a sword thrust into his side simply at the suggestion of the all-powerful molders of public opinion who could so easily sway the human hearts of the people.

I dare say things haven't changed a great deal since then. We still have such molders of public opinion who call forth fear and hatred; cruelty and bigotry, that is still embedded in human hearts.

This Palm Sunday, it is the Cross of Jesus Christ that calls on us to reject the fear and hatred, cruelty and bigotry that lurks within us; and to reject those who pander to such things. The Cross of Jesus Christ is the Throne of our Messiah and King. He has ushered in a new kingdom of love and tolerance.

Humanity is now exposed to a God who would go to the Cross. Humanity now has a God who would tear out His own heart for His people.

This love is prefigured in nature as well. Over the front door of my former Church of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord is a mosaic of a father pelican thrusting his own beak into his chest, bursting his heart to feed his young who are hungry. Such is the love of God revealed to us in Christ Jesus, who nourishes us with his own blood flowing from the Cross of Calvary.

The story is told of a new pastor of a United Church of Christ whose theology focuses much more on the glory of the Resurrection than on the shame of the Cross. He began his first sermon by affirming the Cross. He said, “As a Protestant, I envy the Roman Catholic priest with his crucifix. I would like to go to every church in the land, and holding up the crucifix, cry to the congregation, ‘God loves like that’”.

He went on to explain that his only son died in a tragic accident. He went through a terrible year of grief and sorrow with his wife. He couldn’t eat, he couldn’t sleep, he didn’t know how he could ever pick up his life again. He didn’t even want to.

One sleepless night, as he had frequently, he had a kind of vision, the image of Jesus on the Cross.. He said that in that moment he came to the realization, “that there was no pain I could feel that God didn’t feel, there was no grief I could feel that God didn’t feel. In that moment I realized how intimately God shared in my pain.” He knew, in that moment, “Jesus walks with me.” “Because of that,” he said, “In my ministry, I will always affirm the Cross of Christ!”

Sadly, many in that New Age congregation walked away from their Church because the thought of the Cross made them uncomfortable.

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, we cannot separate Palm Sunday from the week that follows; we cannot separate the glory from the cross. Jesus knew exactly what he was doing when he entered Jerusalem. He came to bare all the evil in human hearts and take it upon himself. He came to usher in a new kingdom of love; a love that will pierce its own heart to feed hearts hungry for love. Our God loves like that!

Continue on this journey into Love when on Holy Thursday when we will celebrate Jesus' gifts of the priesthood and the Eucharist; his agony in the garden and his arrest; on Good Friday when we walk the Stations of the Cross and mourn his death in solemn liturgy; on Holy Saturday, keeping vigil for the bursting forth of a love too strong to be held in the earth, when this new fire of love envelops humanity, and heaven explodes in exaltation; and, finally, on Easter Sunday when glory walks upon the earth from an empty tomb that has overcome all evil, even death itself.