

Mark 11: 1-11

Palm Sunday

A day of rejoicing; a day of anticipation, a day when the spiritual temperature rises.

There has been a lot of new coverage over the past couple of weeks on the provocative, unsettling violence of recent demonstrations. When Jesus rides into Jerusalem he is being provocative – albeit peacefully - but nevertheless he is choosing to make a stand; to stake his claim to being Israel's rightful King. Luke's Gospel tells us that 'he set his face to go to Jerusalem' (Luke 9: 51). Jesus grittily determines his own fate. Different Gospels present the events surrounding Easter differently. John's Gospel presents a low-lying Jesus who is fearful of his future, keeping out of the way in the villages of Ephraim and later, Bethany. It is almost as if Jesus has to psyche himself up for the triumphal march, which, we are told, 'his disciples did not understand'. (John 12: 16).

When we hold up our palm crosses we are identifying with the crowds that enthusiastically greeted Jesus in Jerusalem. We are the saints in that number, cheering Jesus on.

The problem is that the crowds turn rogue. By the end of Holy Week, those who hold palm crosses will be punching the air, clamouring for Jesus to be crucified.

But we weren't actually in Jerusalem waving palms at that moment in time, so what do we have to do with the jeering crowds? To understand this we have to move from the palms to the Passion.

The events of Holy Week reveal that weakness is the root of evil just as much as malice. Who really wants to stand out from the crowd?

Isn't it easier to go with the flow than to stand up for what we may think is right?

Weakness is recorded throughout the Easter Event: the disciples in Gethsemane who couldn't stay awake one hour, and then, fully awake and observing the arrest of Jesus, they deserted in panic; Peter's failure of nerve and threefold denial; the crowds who cheered one minute and jeered the next; Pilate's hand washing. Most of us just want to avoid trouble, keep our heads down and survive. Besides, what difference could we make? We are just one person.

To reflect: What do we have in common with the fickle crowd; do we bend this way and that in order to fit in, putting to one side our personal views? Are we able to tell the truth in difficult circumstances?

Let us pray to God for the strength to stand in the time of trial.

In the light of this, let us enter into the turmoil of Holy Week, aware of who we are, where we stand and poised to reflect on all that lies ahead.