



# The Holy See

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## *HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER*

PALM SUNDAY

*16 April 2000*

1. "*Benedictus, qui venit in nomine Domini...* Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" (*Mt* 21: 9; cf. *Ps* 117 [118]: 26).

In this surging cry we hear an echo of the enthusiastic welcome which the inhabitants of Jerusalem gave Jesus for the feast of Passover. We hear it again each time we sing the *Sanctus* during Mass.

After saying: "*Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua*", we add: "*Benedictus, qui venit in nomine Domini. Hosanna in excelsis*".

In this hymn, whose first part is taken from the prophet Isaiah (cf. *Is* 6: 3), the "thrice holy" God is exalted. In the second part, we express the assembly's grateful joy at the fulfilment of the messianic promises: "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest*".

Our thoughts naturally turn to the people of the Covenant who for centuries and generations lived in expectation of the Messiah. Some believed John the Baptist to be the one in whom the promises would be fulfilled. However, as we know, the Precursor answered the explicit question about his possible messianic identity with a clear denial, referring those who questioned him to Jesus.

There was a growing conviction among the people that the messianic times had now arrived, first through the Baptist's testimony, then through the words and signs performed by Jesus, especially because of the raising of Lazarus, which had occurred a few days before the entry into Jerusalem, of which today's Gospel speaks. This is why, when Jesus arrives in the city riding on a young ass,

the crowd greets him with a burst of joy: "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest*" (Mt 21: 9).

2. The rites of Palm Sunday reflect the people's joy as they wait for the Messiah but, at the same time, they are characterized as a liturgy "of the passion" in the full sense. Indeed, they open before us the prospect of the now imminent drama, which we have just relived in the account of the Evangelist Mark. The other readings too bring us into the mystery of the Lord's passion and death. The words of the prophet Isaiah, whom some like to see as an Old Testament evangelist, show us the image of a condemned man who is scourged and buffeted (cf. *Is* 50: 6). The refrain of the responsorial psalm, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me", has us contemplate the agony of Jesus on the cross (cf. *Mk* 15: 34).

But it is the Apostle Paul who, in the second reading, offers us the deepest analysis of the paschal mystery: Jesus, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant ... he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (*Phil* 2: 6-8). In the austere liturgy of Good Friday we will listen again to these words, which continue: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (*ibid.*, 2: 9-11).

Abasement and exaltation: this is the key to understanding the paschal mystery; this is the key to penetrating God's wonderful plan which is fulfilled in the paschal events.

3. Why are there so many young people present at this solemn liturgy, as there are every year? For some years now Palm Sunday has become the annual feast of young people. From here in 1984, the Year of Youth and, in a certain sense, their jubilee, the pilgrimage of World Youth Days began: passing through Buenos Aires, Santiago de Compostela, Czestochowa, Denver, Manila and Paris, it will return to Rome this August for the World Youth Day of the Holy Year 2000.

Why, then, do so many young people meet on Palm Sunday here in Rome and in every Diocese? There are certainly many reasons and circumstances that can explain this. However, it seems that the most profound motive, underlying all the others, can be identified in what today's liturgy reveals to us: the heavenly Father's mysterious plan of salvation, which is brought about through the abasement and exaltation of his Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. This is the answer to the fundamental questions and anxieties of every man and woman, especially the young.

"For our sake, Christ ... became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him". How significant are these words for our own lives! You are beginning to experience the drama of life, dear young people. You ask yourselves about the meaning of life, your relationship with yourselves, with others and with God. To your heart, thirsting for truth and

peace, to your many questions and problems, sometimes even filled with anguish, Christ, the suffering and humiliated Servant, who humbled himself even unto death on a cross and is exalted in glory at the right hand of the Father, offers himself as the only valid answer. In fact, no other response is as simple, complete and convincing.

4. Dear young people, thank you for taking part in this solemn liturgy. With his entry into Jerusalem, Christ begins his journey of love and sorrow, which is the Cross. Look to him with renewed and zealous faith. Follow him! He does not promise illusory happiness; on the contrary, in order for you to achieve authentic human and spiritual maturity, he invites you to follow his demanding example, making his exacting choices your own.

May Mary, the Lord's faithful disciple, accompany you on this journey of conversion and growing intimacy with her divine Son who, as the theme of the forthcoming World Youth Day recalls, "became flesh and dwelt among us" (*Jn* 1: 14). Jesus became poor to enrich us with his poverty; he took on our sins, so that we might be redeemed by his blood shed on the cross. Yes, for us Christ made himself obedient unto death. Unto death on a cross.

"Glory and praise to you, O Christ!".

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