



The Holy See

CELEBRATION OF PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Saint Peter's Square
22nd World Youth Day
Sunday, 1st April 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the Palm Sunday procession we join with the crowd of disciples who in festive joy accompany the Lord during his entry into Jerusalem. Like them, we praise the Lord with a loud voice for all the miracles we have seen. Yes, we too have seen and still see today the wonders of Christ: how he brings men and women to renounce the comforts of their lives and devote themselves totally to the service of the suffering; how he gives men and women the courage to oppose violence and deceit, to make room for truth in the world; how, in secret, he persuades men and women to do good to others, to bring about reconciliation where there had been hatred and to create peace where enmity had reigned.

The procession is first and foremost a joyful witness that we bear to Jesus Christ, in whom the Face of God became visible to us and thanks to whom the Heart of God is open to us. In Luke's Gospel, the account of the beginning of the procession in the vicinity of Jerusalem is in part modelled literally on the rite of coronation with which, according to the First Book of Kings, Solomon was invested as heir to David's kingship (cf. 1 Kgs 1: 33-35).

Thus, the procession of the Palms is also a procession of Christ the King: we profess the Kingship of Jesus Christ, we recognize Jesus as the Son of David, the true Solomon, the King of peace and justice. Recognizing him as King means accepting him as the One who shows us the way, in whom we trust and whom we follow. It means accepting his Word day after day as a valid criterion for our life. It means seeing in him the authority to which we submit. We submit to him because his

authority is the authority of the truth.

The procession of the Palms - as it was at that time for the disciples - is primarily an expression of joy because we are able to recognize Jesus, because he allows us to be his friends and because he has given us the key to life. This joy, however, which is at the beginning, is also an expression of our "yes" to Jesus and our willingness to go with him wherever he takes us. The exhortation with which our Liturgy today begins, therefore, correctly interprets the procession as a symbolic representation of what we call the "following of Christ": "Let us ask for the grace to follow him", we said. The expression "following of Christ" is a description of the whole of Christian existence. In what does it consist? What does "to follow Christ" actually mean?

At the outset, with the first disciples, its meaning was very simple and immediate: it meant that to go with Jesus these people decided to give up their profession, their affairs, their whole life. It meant undertaking a new profession: discipleship. The fundamental content of this profession was accompanying the Teacher and total entrustment to his guidance. The "following" was therefore something external, but at the same time very internal. The exterior aspect was walking behind Jesus on his journeys through Palestine; the interior aspect was the new existential orientation whose reference points were no longer in events, in work as a source of income or in the personal will, but consisted in total abandonment to the will of Another. Being at his disposal, henceforth, became the *raison d'être* of life. In certain Gospel scenes we can recognize quite clearly that this means the renouncement of one's possessions and detachment from oneself.

But with this it is also clear what "following" means for us and what its true essence is for us: it is an interior change of life. It requires me no longer to be withdrawn into myself, considering my own fulfilment the main reason for my life. It requires me to give myself freely to Another - for truth, for love, for God who, in Jesus Christ, goes before me and shows me the way. It is a question of the fundamental decision no longer to consider usefulness and gain, my career and success as the ultimate goals of my life, but instead to recognize truth and love as authentic criteria. It is a question of choosing between living only for myself or giving myself - for what is greater. And let us understand properly that truth and love are not abstract values; in Jesus Christ they have become a person. By following him, I enter into the service of truth and love. By losing myself I find myself.

Let us return to the liturgy and the procession of the Palms. In it the Liturgy has provided as the hymn Psalm 24[23]. In Israel this was also a processional hymn used in the ascent to the hill of the temple. The Psalm interprets the interior ascent, of which the exterior ascent is an image, and explains to us once again what it means to ascend with Christ. "Who can ascend the mountain of the Lord?" the Psalm asks and specifies two essential conditions. Those who ascend it and truly desire to reach the heights, to arrive at the true summit, must be people who question themselves about God. They must be people who scan their surroundings seeking God, seeking his Face.

Dear young friends, how important precisely this is today: not merely to let oneself be taken here and there in life; not to be satisfied with what everyone else thinks and says and does. To probe God and to seek God. Not letting the question about God dissolve in our souls; desiring what is greater, desiring to know him - his Face...

The other very concrete condition for the ascent is this: He "who has clean hands and a pure heart" can stand in the holy place. Clean hands are hands that are not used for acts of violence. They are hands that are not soiled with corruption, with bribery. A pure heart - when is the heart pure? A heart is pure when it does not pretend and is not stained with lies and hypocrisy: a heart that remains transparent like spring water because it is alien to duplicity. A heart is pure when it does not estrange itself with the drunkenness of pleasure, a heart in which love is true and is not only a momentary passion. Clean hands and a pure heart: if we walk with Jesus, we ascend and find the purification that truly brings us to that height to which man is destined: friendship with God himself.

Psalm 24[23], which speaks of the ascent, ends with an entrance liturgy in front of the temple gate: "Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! That the King of glory may come in". In the old liturgy for Palm Sunday, the priest, arriving in front of the church, would knock loudly with the shaft of the processional cross on the door that was still closed; thereupon, it would be opened. This was a beautiful image of the mystery of Jesus Christ himself who, with the wood of his Cross, with the power of his love that is given, knocked from the side of the world at God's door; on the side of a world that was not able to find access to God. With his Cross, Jesus opened God's door, the door between God and men. Now it is open. But the Lord also knocks with his Cross from the other side: he knocks at the door of the world, at the doors of our hearts, so many of which are so frequently closed to God. And he says to us something like this: if the proof that God gives you of his existence in creation does not succeed in opening you to him, if the words of Scripture and the Church's message leave you indifferent, then look at me - the God who let himself suffer for you, who personally suffers with you - and open yourself to me, your Lord and your God.

It is this appeal that we allow to penetrate our hearts at this moment. May the Lord help us to open the door of our hearts, the door of the world, so that he, the living God, may arrive in his Son in our time, and reach our life. Amen.

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