



CELEBRATION OF PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS



SAINT PETER'S SQUARE
XXVIII WORLD YOUTH DAY
SUNDAY, 24 MARCH 2013

[VIDEO]

1. Jesus enters Jerusalem. The crowd of disciples accompanies him in festive mood, their garments are stretched out before him, there is talk of the miracles he has accomplished, and loud praises are heard: "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Lk 19:38).

Crowds, celebrating, praise, blessing, peace: joy fills the air. Jesus has awakened great hopes, especially in the hearts of the simple, the humble, the poor, the forgotten, those who do not matter in the eyes of the world. He understands human sufferings, he has shown the face of God's mercy, and he has bent down to heal body and soul.

This is Jesus. This is his heart which looks to all of us, to our sicknesses, to our sins. The love of Jesus is great. And thus he enters Jerusalem, with this love, and looks at us. It is a beautiful scene, full of light - the light of the love of Jesus, the love of his heart - of joy, of celebration.

At the beginning of Mass, we too repeated it. We waved our palms, our olive branches. We too welcomed Jesus; we too expressed our joy at accompanying him, at knowing him to be close, present in us and among us as a friend, a brother, and also as a King: that is, a shining beacon for our lives. Jesus is God, but he lowered himself to walk with us. He is our friend, our brother. He illumines our path here. And in this way we have welcomed him today. And here the first word that I wish to say to you: *joy!* Do not be men and women of sadness: a Christian can never be sad! Never give way to discouragement! Ours is not a joy born of having many possessions, but from having encountered a Person: Jesus, in our midst; it is born from knowing that with him we are never alone, even at difficult moments, even when our life's journey comes up against problems and obstacles that seem

insurmountable, and there are so many of them! And in this moment the enemy, the devil, comes, often disguised as an angel, and slyly speaks his word to us. Do not listen to him! Let us follow Jesus! We accompany, we follow Jesus, but above all we know that he accompanies us and carries us on his shoulders. This is our joy, this is the hope that we must bring to this world. Please do not let yourselves be robbed of hope! Do not let hope be stolen! The hope that Jesus gives us.

2. The second word. Why does Jesus enter Jerusalem? Or better: how does Jesus enter Jerusalem? The crowds acclaim him as King. And he does not deny it, he does not tell them to be silent (cf. *Lk 19:39-40*). But what kind of a King is Jesus? Let us take a look at him: he is riding on a donkey, he is not accompanied by a court, he is not surrounded by an army as a symbol of power. He is received by humble people, simple folk who have the sense to see something more in Jesus; they have that sense of the faith which says: here is the Saviour. Jesus does not enter the Holy City to receive the honours reserved to earthly kings, to the powerful, to rulers; he enters to be scourged, insulted and abused, as Isaiah foretold in the First Reading (cf. *Is 50:6*). He enters to receive a crown of thorns, a staff, a purple robe: his kingship becomes an object of derision. He enters to climb Calvary, carrying his burden of wood. And this brings us to the second word: *Cross*. Jesus enters Jerusalem in order to die on the Cross. And it is precisely here that his kingship shines forth in godly fashion: his royal throne is the wood of the Cross! It reminds me of what Benedict XVI said to the Cardinals: you are princes, but of a king crucified. That is the throne of Jesus. Jesus takes it upon himself... Why the Cross? Because Jesus takes upon himself the evil, the filth, the sin of the world, including the sin of all of us, and he cleanses it, he cleanses it with his blood, with the mercy and the love of God. Let us look around: how many wounds are inflicted upon humanity by evil! Wars, violence, economic conflicts that hit the weakest, greed for money that you can't take with you and have to leave. When we were small, our grandmother used to say: a shroud has no pocket. Love of power, corruption, divisions, crimes against human life and against creation! And – as each one of us knows and is aware – our personal sins: our failures in love and respect towards God, towards our neighbour and towards the whole of creation. Jesus on the Cross feels the whole weight of the evil, and with the force of God's love he conquers it, he defeats it with his resurrection. This is the good that Jesus does for us on the throne of the Cross. Christ's Cross embraced with love never leads to sadness, but to joy, to the joy of having been saved and of doing a little of what he did on the day of his death.

3. Today in this Square, there are many young people: for twenty-eight years Palm Sunday has been World Youth Day! This is our third word: *youth*! Dear young people, I saw you in the procession as you were coming in; I think of you celebrating around Jesus, waving your olive branches. I think of you crying out his name and expressing your joy at being with him! You have an important part in the celebration of faith! You bring us the joy of faith and you tell us that we must live the faith with a young heart, always: a young heart, even at the age of seventy or eighty. Dear young people! With Christ, the heart never grows old! Yet all of us, all of you know very well that the King whom we follow and who accompanies us is very special: he is a King who loves even to the Cross and who teaches us to serve and to love. And you are not ashamed of his Cross! On the contrary, you embrace it, because you have understood that it is in giving ourselves, in giving ourselves, in emerging from ourselves that we have true joy and that, with his love, God conquered evil. You carry the pilgrim Cross through all the Continents, along the highways of the world! You carry it in response to Jesus' call: "Go, make disciples of all nations" (*Mt 28:19*), which is the theme of World Youth Day this year. You carry it so as to tell everyone that on the Cross Jesus knocked down the wall of enmity that divides people and nations, and he brought reconciliation and peace. Dear friends, I too am setting out on a journey with you, starting today, in the footsteps of Blessed John Paul II and Benedict XVI. We are already close to the next stage of this great pilgrimage of the Cross. I look forward joyfully to next July in Rio de Janeiro! I will see you in that great city in Brazil! Prepare well – prepare spiritually above all – in your communities, so that our gathering in Rio may be a sign of faith for the whole world. Young people must say to the world: to follow Christ is good; to go with Christ is good; the message of Christ is good; emerging from ourselves, to the ends of the earth and of existence, to take Jesus there, is good! Three points, then: joy, Cross, young people.

Let us ask the intercession of the Virgin Mary. She teaches us the joy of meeting Christ, the love with which we must look to the foot of the Cross, the enthusiasm of the young heart with which we must follow him during this Holy Week and throughout our lives. May it be so.

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