
Palm Sunday: We Walk in Witness

A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler

Atlanta, Georgia

PALM SUNDAY: THE SUNDAY OF THE PASSION

Why do we march around the Cathedral today? Why are we parading around shouting "Hosanna?"

I have usually claimed that we are re-enacting the dramatic entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Two thousand years ago, Jesus entered his destiny; and the people acclaimed him as the new king, the descendant of David, the new great hero. It was a great city parade back in those days, much like a parade in our time might give glory, laud, and honor to the World Series baseball champions.

In hindsight, we all know now that the people's shouts and praises were naïve back then. We all know that those praises turned -ever so quickly-- into accusations not three days later. The man they thought was to be the new King turned out to be the King of something else. The people felt betrayed back then, just like we would, if all the World Series winners turned out to be using steroids.

The people were wrong, of course, but that didn't stop their betrayal. The people betrayed Jesus. Today, we re-enact the people's acclamations, but we also re-enact the people's betrayal.

One lesson to be learned today is that all of betray the one we love. It is a hard lesson, but we do it time and time again. We betray the one we love the most, and often we betray the one who loves us most.

Is this why we march around the Cathedral today? Yes, I suppose that the Palm Sunday procession is about all this. Okay. That's right.

But there is another reason we march. Our action is about something else.

In fact, we make a witness today, when we march around this building.

The witness we make is that we, ourselves, voluntarily accept this pattern of acclamation of betrayal.

We give witness that this way is at the heart of our Christian faith. It is a way of earnest hope, hopeless sin, and then sinful betrayal.

We all participate in it. The way of God knows that our human condition is fallible. We fall short of the goal. We betray. We hurt one another.

But when we walk in witness today, we are saying that we accept this way of God. Because this way does not end with our sin. The way of God does not end with our vicious words, "Crucify him!"

The way of God, even on this Sunday of the Passion, ends with God giving his body and blood to us in grace. That is why

we take communion today. That is why we admit not just our betrayal, but we also accept God's forgiveness.

We witness dramatically today, we witness to ourselves and to the world. We witness that the Christian way is the way of suffering and redemption, the way of betrayal and forgiveness.

Yes, we betray Jesus. But, an even greater "yes," Jesus forgives us. Jesus pours himself out for us. Yes, we will crucify Jesus. Yet, Yes, God forgives us.

This is what Palm Sunday, the Sunday of the Passion, means. We re-enact not just the passion of Jesus. We also re-enact the giving grace of God. We walk completely around the Cathedral, outside, for the world to see, as a witness to this way, as an invitation to come inside for some grace of God.

We practice the entire pattern today. In our ignorance, in our weakness, in our sin, we betray God; and we betray one another. But God has mercy. The circle is complete; the way finds its destiny, when God feeds us with the body and the blood of a living, and forgiving, Christ.

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip