

RENEW LENT - PALM SUNDAY

MARCH 24, 2024

A Different Take

By Stephanie Molloy

My first placement as a parish minister, which is what we who took care of parishes with no resident priest were called back in the day, was in two rural communities. I'd just completed my M.Div., and though parish life was certainly familiar to me, being "in charge" was a brand new experience.

One of the ways I would get over my insecurities and anxieties was to pass the time in prayer and contemplation by walking along the grid roads bordering the fields just outside of town. There I experienced the vast prairie skies and the beauty of the fields, and watching them come together at the horizon – what a gift it was! And to add to what would end up being an image that I continue to carry to this day, I knew Jesus walked with me. Even when I didn't know where I was going in life, I could picture our two sets of feet walking along the road together.

I wonder what Jesus saw as he rode into Jerusalem. Of course, he saw the people, all amped up at his entry and eager to show the Romans, who ruled over them, that their Messiah had finally come to restore them to their rightful place. (Okay, so it may have been the wrong picture they had in their minds, but go with me here.)

I wonder if Jesus looked out over the countryside in awe of the wooded hills and fertile lowlands on one side of the road and the barren wilderness of the desert on the other and thought, "This is so beautiful." I wonder if he appreciated the moment and basked in calm and happy peace. I mean, this was the pilgrimage he'd been on his entire adult life with all its ups and downs, hills and valleys, accolades, and threats. I wonder if he simply thanked God for all of it.

I've never thought of Palm Sunday this way before. But I suspect that was at least part of what Jesus felt on his way to an uncertain future.

We're entering into Holy Week, part of our own annual pilgrimage amid the most sacred and holy time of year. I wonder who among us will take time to ponder and appreciate the hills and valleys of our own life pilgrimage and thank God for the blessings that have been showered on us? That's not to say that we ignore the pain, the hurts, and the injustices that have been put upon us personally, on people around the world, or even on the earth itself. Because those are realities we can't escape, nor are we meant to.



But for this one day, rather than dwelling on the anxiety of the unknown, as Jesus could rightly have done, can we look around us and say “thank you.” Thank you for the prairie sky; thank you for teaching me things throughout the pain I’ve experienced; thank you for putting others in my life who love me; thank you for God loving me for who I am and not for who I should be.

Jesus likely knew that the pomp and ceremony surrounding his arrival at Jerusalem would be short-lived. But I simply cannot believe he was morose, even if the people’s hope was misguided in the type of Messiah they were expecting, even though they would ultimately reject him in the most total and final way. He loved the people -- **his** people, **his** community, **his** family -- and knew he was loved in return.

I believe he would have been calm, reflective, thankful, and even happy as he rode that colt into the city. That’s also why I think that, as we carry our palms (or pussy willows) around in procession this day, we spend time not ruing or bemoaning our own hypocrisy (because we know we, too, will reject him and his message from time to time), but rather that we open ourselves to believing that this traveling companion of ours wants us to feel the same way – calm, reflective, thankful, and happy. For this brief time, let’s forget anxiety, fear, failings, and any other things that keep us from feeling God’s love for us and live in love. For Jesus’s sake, for our sake, and for the sake of the world.

I used to have a poster in my office that offered a quote I continue to use. It said: “Dammit . . . I mean, thank you.”

Thank you, Jesus, for walking with me as I walk with you on this entry into Holy Week.

For Your Reflection:

- Do you have anxieties that are coming with you into Holy Week? Can you name them?
- We've had a very strange winter, and spring seems to be entering the same way. Can you take an hour this week – or half an hour or 15 minutes – and find a place to simply “be” with your traveling companion, Jesus? Maybe have a look for some pussy willows or crocuses (in person or in your imagination) or something else that brings you calm, trust, or a reminder that God has blessed you.
- Jesus faced betrayal and torture after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Yet he entered with an attitude of gratitude. How does this realization affect you in your life today?

*Gracious God, On this Palm Sunday, Help us to
reflect on Your journey into Jerusalem. May we find
calm amidst life's storms, And joy in Your constant
companionship.*

Amen.