

Palm Sunday Year A – Passion Sunday - Year A - March 29, 2026 – Msgr. Peter Quang Nguyen

Procession – Matthew 21:1-11: The Palm Sunday Mass begins with Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, where he rode on a donkey and was greeted by crowds of people who praised him as the Son of David and King of Israel.

First Reading – Isaiah 50:4-7: The prophet Isaiah speaks of a servant of God who is a skilled teacher and obedient to God’s will, even in the face of persecution and suffering. The servant trusts in God’s protection and ultimately prevails over his oppressors.

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 22: This psalm describes the anguish of a suffering individual who feels abandoned by God and is mocked and persecuted by others. Despite this, the speaker expresses trust in God’s ultimate protection and proclaims God’s glory to others.

Second Reading – Philippians 2:6-11: This passage describes the selfless humility of Jesus Christ, who, despite being divine, chose to become human and submit to a humiliating death on a cross. As a result of his obedience, God exalted him and gave him a name above all others, that every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Gospel – Matthew 26:14 – 27:66: The gospel for Palm Sunday is always one of the accounts of the Passion. In Year A it is taken from the Gospel of Matthew. The Passion reading describes the events leading up to Jesus’ crucifixion and death. It includes Jesus’ betrayal by Judas Iscariot, his arrest and trial before the high priest, his denial by Peter, his sentencing by Pilate, his crucifixion and death, and his burial in a tomb.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

“WORSHIPPING A CRUCIFIED GOD”

On Palm Sunday, we hear two Gospel readings: one during the blessing of the palms at the beginning of the service, and the other during the Liturgy of the Word within the Mass. These two Gospel accounts present two scenarios that are almost diametrically opposed. While the first Gospel depicts a solemn and joyful procession as the Lord enters the Temple, the second (the Passion narrative) portrays a sorrowful procession leading the Lord up to Mount Calvary. The very people who once held palm branches aloft to acclaim the Son of David were the same people who raised their hands to demand that this very Son be crucified.

Why such a drastic reversal? The primary reason we can discern is that the people were disillusioned by a Messiah who did not align with their expectations—a Messiah who refused to bend to their will or satisfy their desires. This is the theme we shall explore together below:

One day, someone asked Father Anthony de Mello: *“Who gave birth to God?”* He replied with a touch of humor: *“Human beings gave birth to God.”* The inquirer then asked: *“In that case, who killed God?”* He answered once again: *“It was human beings themselves who killed God.”*

Indeed, the Jewish people constructed a God fashioned according to their own will, rather than adhering to the revelation conveyed through the prophets and the Law. They envisioned a God cast in a purely human mold, seeking to compel God to satisfy their own worldly aspirations. In doing so, they effectively killed the true God—the God of love. And from that point on, they fashioned for themselves a Messiah consumed by an ambition for power and worldly wealth—one who would conquer all foes, commanding vast retinues, and ascending to become the supreme ruler of the world. In doing so, they effectively killed—within their own hearts—the true Messiah: the One who practiced (*kenosis*) (*self-emptying*), renouncing His heavenly throne to assume the form of a slave, all to redeem humanity from the yoke of sin, the world, and the devil—just as described in Saint Paul’s Letter to the Philippians (2:6–11), the Second Reading we have just heard.

Thus, when people idolize someone—placing their hopes and expectations upon an individual they believe can satisfy their every desire—they will lavish upon that person the utmost praise and adulation. Yet, if the object of their expectations fails to fulfill those desires, they quickly turn against him, crying out for his downfall. Their hatred becomes precisely as intense as their prior expectation; they construct an image of God in their own minds and demand that He bend to their will. When Jesus failed to conform to their expectations, they turned against Him and put Him to death. It was precisely because Jesus came to do the will of His Heavenly Father—rather than the will of men—that men condemned Him to die.

Perhaps, as we listen to the Passion narrative, we find it easy to cast blame upon the Jewish people; yet, in truth, their behavior often mirrors the reality of many among us—a reality of which we remain largely unaware. We still tend to prefer a God of awe-inspiring majesty and power—one who is quick to punish—rather than worshipping the crucified Jesus: the One who forgives and loves unconditionally.

In our social relationships, we often seek out friends who can bring us some tangible benefit; yet, if those individuals fail to satisfy our wants, we are all too prone to betraying one another.

- Within the context of our parish communities, we often prefer those who bring material benefits to the parish—those who provide financial support or tangible resources—over the priests, brothers, and sisters who seem to do nothing more than fold their hands in prayer.
- Within religious communities, there is no shortage of individuals who prefer others to cater to their personal preferences; consequently, they do not hesitate to condemn and cast out those members who dare to live and speak the truth.
- In married life, couples initially expect one another to fulfill their every desire; however, once united, they often face disillusionment when their partner fails to satisfy those expectations—leading to discord and mutual betrayal. All of this stems from the absence of true love at the very beginning.

Finally, in our Christian lives today, we are all too prone to embracing outward grandeur rather than seeking inner depth. We remain faithful when life is smooth and fortunate, yet when trials arise, we turn to blame God and may even abandon our faith entirely.

Furthermore, when faced with difficulties imposed by secular authorities, we often hope for God to intervene with divine retribution rather than accepting the trial and praying for those who oppose us. Jesus did not yield to the taunts of His adversaries by descending from the Cross; instead, He accepted death in order to obey the will of His Father.

In summary, as Christians, are we worshipping a crucified God, or a God of imposing power and miracles? Are we worshipping a Savior who acts in accordance with the Father's will, or an idol that merely caters to our own desires? Jesus did not halt His journey after the triumphal procession into the Temple; rather, He had to continue His pilgrimage from there up to Mount Calvary. The life of faith is not merely a journey from our homes to the church; it must also be a journey outward from the church—carrying the image of the authentic Jesus to all those suffering amidst the trials and tribulations of a life lived as a witness.

O Lord Jesus, as we enter into Holy Week, grant us the awareness that we are walking with You upon the path of the Cross to bring about salvation—rather than seeking to evade the Cross by following the easy path that leads to destruction. Amen.