

Immanuel, 10th April 2022
Philippians 2; 5-11 Luke 19; 28-40

Is there anything missing?

After hearing the readings today, what's missing? I'll give you a few seconds to think about it

.....

Have you come up with anything? Let me give you a clue: I hesitate to call today "Palm Sunday" after hearing the Gospel reading, even if you do have a palm cross with you... has that helped?

So, let's get into the reading, which in Luke is so rather different from the other Gospels, we are used to the donkey, and we will even sing about it in a few moments, but in Luke there is no donkey, though the other Gospels do mention a colt as we have here. In Luke we don't hear of palm branches, we hear no Hosannas (though there is the quote from the Psalm: Blessed), and the crowd is described as "*a multitude of the disciples*". Isn't it strange how we get used to a certain way of things and don't realise if they are missing because we think they are always there? And what is missing in Mark and Matthew is the final verse today: the Pharisees telling Jesus to order the disciples to stop the acclamation.

So, my question is: if what is missing is missing, what is the importance of what does happen? And what is the relevance for us today?

The entry to Jerusalem is important because Luke has been preparing us for this moment for over half the Gospel, when in chapter 9:51 we read "*When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem*". Jerusalem is important because:

- It is the capital city, the seat of power both religious and political
- It is where Jesus has been heading to die. It is the place which Jesus as told us about: *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it* (Lk 13:34). **This is not the place of triumph, is it the place of death...** it is the place of emptying, and this is where the reading from Philippians sheds light: *Jesus emptied himself taking the form of a slave...he humbles himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross* of course, this reading continues, to the exaltation but we must wait for this.

Jesus enters, in the completely different way than the powers that meet to celebrate Passover, who come in with the roman guards to remind all people who is in control; Jesus comes in to fulfil the words of the prophets of long ago, he enters in humility not in triumph, he enters to show us what God is doing in the work for the kingdom, and the teaching for us in all this, is what this kingdom is all about. It is not about power that dominates, it is about power that serves, this is not about silence in the face of injustice, it is about celebrating the fullness of life for all.

Let me take you back to the first Sunday in Lent, the one when the reading from Luke showed us Jesus being tempted (Luke 4), and the second temptation was "I will give you glory and

authority over the kingdoms of this world". Was this what it was all about? And Jesus simply points out that only God should be served and worshiped, not the devil.

Jesus' enters Jerusalem with little pomp but with a new dramatic vision, his power is not the power from the devil, but the power from God, the power for salvation, for justice, for solidarity, for service; power to transform oppressive realities for so many into new opportunities of life, the power of war to be replaced by the power of peace. And in coming into Jerusalem in such a way and doing what he will do in the next week, we are challenged to learn what that vision of life is all about for us now, here.

All during Lent the readings have been inviting us to be different from what the world sees as valid and important. The readings have invited us to trust God's way, as we learn in Jesus. Pilate may think the support of the Empire gives him legitimacy; we know that is a lie. Jesus shows us the truth in God, that is why it is important that certain things can go missing if there are other things that are central and remain. We must discover each time, what is important, what should be a sign of God's values, and we should live them and share them and proclaim them, because if the stones are the ones that will shout aloud, then we are in deep problems.

The challenge today for us, for the church here and everywhere, is to discern what Jesus stands for, so that it becomes the norm of our existence, and as I mentioned last Sunday, we are at the crossroads of new opportunities and we must respond so the essentials are proclaimed, are shared and life is transformed for all, and not for a few. Amen.