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March 12, 2008



Sixth Sunday of Lent

Palm Sunday procession leads Christ to his passion, and to eternal life for us

March 16, 2008 :: [Mt 21:1-11](#); [Is 50:4-7](#); [Ps 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24](#); [Phil 2:6-11](#) [Mt 26:14-27:66](#)

MSGR. MICHAEL REED

Jesus rode into the city of Jerusalem astride a beast of burden and carrying upon himself the burdens of the world. It was a procession reminiscent of the rededication of the temple after the Maccabean Revolt in B.C. 164. “Carrying rods entwined with leaves, green branches and palms, they sang hymns of grateful praise to him who had brought about the purification of his own place. By public edict and decree they prescribed that the whole Jewish nation should celebrate these days every year” (2 Macc 10:1-8). So Jesus would purify the temple like a new Judas Maccabeus and restore what had been desecrated and defiled. Down the ancient streets making his way through a corridor of palm branches toward the Jerusalem Temple, Jesus would invite the world to drink fully of a sacrifice and love beyond human understanding. Lifted in blessing just outside the walls on a skull-shaped section of a stone quarry (in Hebrew, “Golgotha” — “place of the skull”), Jesus was the stone rejected by

the builders (Mt 21:42; Ps 118:22-23) who would become the cornerstone of a new temple, not made by human hands, but of incorruptible living stones destined to stand forever.

It was Passover and Jesus would celebrate the traditional exodus meal with his disciples in an upper room. There would be the unleavened bread of deliverance and the four cups: cup of thanksgiving (Ex 3:8-12), cup of suffering (Ex 6:6), cup of blessing (Dt 26:8) and cup of Melchizedek (Lv 26:12). This would be a celebration of liberation remembering the 430 years of Israel's slavery in Egypt. Freedom had come. Salvation had entered the threshold of a new world in the person of Jesus, who was and is the "Lamb of God" who takes away the sin of the world.

From the Passover meal, Jesus would walk through the Kidron Valley, past the tomb of the Prophet Zachariah to the Garden of Gethsemane (in Hebrew "wine press") where he would pray for deliverance, beseeching the Father to "take this cup away from me" (Mk 14:36). And this cup is the biblical "cup of wrath" described by the prophets Isaiah (Is 51:17-23) and Jeremiah (Jer 25:15-17). It is the very real cup that each human person creates from the moment of their birth. It is filled with the wine that comes from actions, deeds, choices, decisions, and lives. And on the day of judgment, the God of justice gives us our cup to drink — a cup filled with the poison of sin. In the garden, Jesus took our cup and bears the wrath that should rightly be ours. He would drink the deadly cup of our sins so that we might not die, but live.

From the garden, Jesus would be betrayed, arrested, tried, condemned, scourged, crowned with thorns and forced to carry a cross in another procession to a place where the rejected of society were executed. From the place of rejection, Jesus would embrace us and all of humanity. With outstretched arms, uttering words of forgiveness, commendation and thirst, Jesus calls us to follow him in the procession winding its way into eternal life.

Msgr. Reed is chancellor of the Pensacola-Tallahassee Diocese.

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