

Luke 19:28-40
Isaiah 50:4-7
Psalm 22
Philippians 2:6-11
Luke 22:14—23:56
Homilist: Deacon Mike Mocek

April 14, 2019, Palm Sunday

We have heard two very different Gospel readings this morning, both taken from the Gospel of Luke. First, at the procession, we heard from the nineteenth chapter of Luke about Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. And just now, from the twenty-second and twenty-third chapters of Luke, we heard a narration of the Passion of Jesus, which took place in and around Jerusalem. Though we celebrate these events within the seven days of Holy Week, they probably took place over a more lengthy period of time. The twentieth and twenty-first chapters of Luke describe Jesus' extensive ministry in Jerusalem during the time between his entry and his Passion. Luke says Jesus would teach in the temple area during the day and stay at the Mount of Olives at night. People would get up early each morning and go to the temple area to hear him teach, while the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders would plot to trap him, have him arrested, and put to death.

Crowds were a big part of the events recorded in these Gospel readings. The crowd that greeted Jesus as he entered Jerusalem was diverse and wildly enthusiastic. The people were already in a festive mood because many of them were pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Passover. When they saw Jesus, not walking as they were, but riding on a colt, some of the more knowledgeable pilgrims recognized it as fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah, "your

king shall come to you; a just savior, meek and riding on a colt." As the procession approached Jerusalem, their excitement grew and spread among others, even to those unaware of Zechariah's prophecy. Shouts of, "Hosanna," and, "Blessed is the king," rose from the pilgrims, as well as from curious bystanders and many others who had been beneficiaries of his miracles. Though this crowd was loud and enthusiastic, their commitment was shallow. Their enthusiasm would soon wane as the people began to sense danger from the rumors and conspiracies directed against Jesus while he was teaching in the temple area.

A second crowd that we heard about in today's reading of the Passion consisted of people gathered in the courtyard during the trial of Jesus. This crowd very likely contained many of the same people who had cheered Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. But now, stoked by the actions of religious leaders, their shouts of "Hosanna!" were replaced with "Crucify him!" Though Pilate argued that Jesus was not guilty of any capital crime, this crowd demanded that he be executed. So out of fear, Pilate relented and handed Jesus over to them to be crucified.

There is yet a third large crowd in today's readings, comprised of the people who followed Jesus – first to Calvary, and then to his tomb. There were many women in this crowd who wept for Jesus and performed rituals of mourning. Jesus knew they were there. It was the only group to whom he spoke during his Passion. "Daughters of Jerusalem," he said, "do not weep for me, weep instead for yourselves and for your children." This third crowd could do little other than to follow Jesus, but of the three crowds, they were the only

ones to show any sort of remorse or grief over what was happening to him.

At the risk of over simplification, the first crowd might be characterized as superficial. They were loud and boisterous, but they lost their enthusiasm as things became more difficult. The second crowd could be called complicit bystanders and collaborators. Their commitment was to their own well-being, and their allegiance shifted like the winds, responding to the actions of agitators. The people in the third crowd were the only ones who really cared. Their presence and their care were all that they had to offer, and that was all that really mattered to Jesus.

As Christians in today's world, we should ask ourselves, "With which crowd do I most closely identify?" Is my faith superficial like that of the first crowd? When I am in the right mood, do I proclaim loudly that "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior," but then fail to live my faith in times of adversity? Do I, like the second crowd, allow the winds of politicians, news-talk showboats, and even my friends to sway my religious convictions? Or, can I be like the third crowd, steadfastly following Jesus – serving him and serving others even when all I am able to do is be present and care?