

Hosanna to the Son of David

Sunday 5th April this year, is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week. And Holy Week is the week during which we remember the final days of Jesus before His Death and Resurrection. This includes the Last Supper and His betrayal and arrest on Maundy Thursday; His mock trial before the High Priest and Sanhedrin; His interrogation by the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate; and then finally His Crucifixion on Good Friday. We remember all these things during Holy Week. It's the most sacred week in the Christian calendar, for obvious reasons.

But this sombre and sacred week starts on Palm Sunday when Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, and is greeted with cheers and shouts of joy as the people line the streets waving palm branches in celebration of Jesus' arrival. They even throw down their coats and cloaks on the street in front of Jesus as He rides through the city, and the people cry out:

"Hosanna to the Son of David"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt 21:9).

News of Jesus' arrival spreads rapidly through the city, everyone came out onto the streets to welcome Him. His astonishing reputation had preceded Him, and it was much like a royal visit today. The crowds hail Him as their Saviour. The word '*Hosanna*' which the people shout out, means 'save, we pray'. And the cheering and shouting goes on. This account of Jesus arriving in Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week, is traditionally known as the Triumphal Entry, as He received such a rapturous reception from the people; not just the citizens of Jerusalem, but from the whole nation, as all people of Israel gathered together in the capital to celebrate the Feast of the Passover.

When entering the city, Jesus choice of a donkey was no accident. He was well aware of the prophecy in Zechariah (cf. Zec 9:9) and so too were the people. Everyone knew that the Messiah was the rightful 'King of the Jews' and His riding into Jerusalem on a donkey was a deliberate public statement that He was tacitly accepting both titles. So the people were not just cheering a great teacher or prophet or miracle worker, they were cheering the Messiah, their King.

Clap for Carers

Last Thursday evening at 8pm the people of Britain came out onto the streets to "Clap for Carers" and to "Clap for the NHS". And good – I certainly approve of this gesture of thanks to those who are working so hard and selflessly to help us through this current crisis; especially as they are putting themselves in harm's way for our sake. This gesture of thanks to NHS staff and Carers, received wide coverage and promotion across the media.

However, I couldn't help but see the similarities with Palm Sunday, when the people came out onto the streets of Jerusalem to cheer and shout praise to Jesus and cry out to Him, "Hosanna" ('save us, we pray'). I wonder, how many people are seriously, and with genuine faith, looking to God, to Christ, to save us and bring us through this time of crisis? How many are crying out to Him today, "save us, we pray". Not many, I would say. Certainly not many as a percentage of the population.

Now you might want to argue with that, and simply call it my opinion – well fair enough. But let me point out that there hasn't been a single mention of God in all the massive media coverage of covid-19 I have watched over the last two weeks – not a single serious mention, and my apologies if I've missed something. Yes, it was reported that worship services were suspended, but that's not the kind of publicity I'm talking about.

There hasn't been any attempt by any of the various broadcasters across the different news channels to try and understand how God fits into all of this or where faith comes into the equation. I haven't seen one bishop or religious figure properly interviewed on main stream TV about God in a time of crisis. There have been one or two clergy interviewed briefly, but that was because they were assisting and offering aid to the vulnerable, but again, that's a different kind of interview.

Following the government lockdown and suspension of church services, the Archbishop broadcast a service from Lambeth Palace on Sunday 22 March. But it was limited to local radio – no TV. It went out at 8am on the Sunday morning but was never reshowed later on TV, not even highlights. This was the Archbishop of Canterbury broadcasting to the nation in a time of crisis and he was all but ignored by the mainstream media. As far as they were concerned this was a non-event, but is typical of how the media treat the church and religious figures these days. It is entertainers, broadcasters and reporters, even sports figures, who are brought on to the prime time news channels to discuss the papers and current affairs – because their opinions matter, it seems. This is a deeply telling sign of where the UK is right now in its relationship with God; it would seem – as a nation anyway – that we don't have one anymore.

Doom and Gloom

Now I'm well aware that this all sounds a bit gloomy and downbeat – all a bit 'glass half empty'. But, as the Christian community in this country, we have to be realistic about our situation. It's no good looking at things through rose coloured spectacles and then kidding ourselves that all is well with the world – it isn't. We have a truly herculean task to try and show our nation that it needs to turn back to God in a serious way and truly embrace Christ and His Word, and once more proclaim Him "Our Lord and King".

How we do this, I don't know – I wish I did. Certainly there are no simple answers, no quick fix. What I do know is that we need to be praying, not just that God will bring us through this covid-19 crisis – and I'm certainly praying for that – but we must also be praying that God will turn this nation back to Him and His Son, Jesus Christ. We need to remember, as Jesus said: "With God all things are possible" (cf. Mark 10:27). We also need to remember what the Lord said, through the prophet Joel:

"Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

Amen.