

Notes from the Liturgist...

CHURCH as a PILGRIM

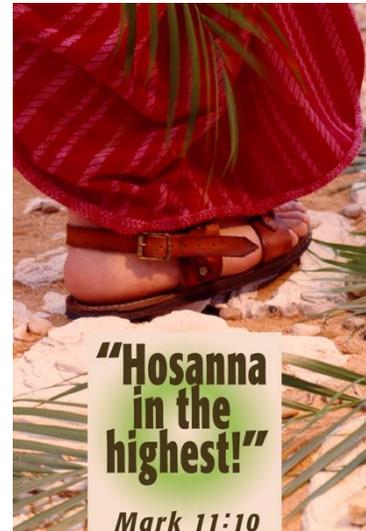
Since I was introduced to the faith by my parents, I became more active and faithful to the liturgy of the church. One of the traditions/forms of prayer of the church that was planted in my mind and became part of my life was attending the processions during major feasts of the Catholic Church. Joining a procession became a very meaningful expression of faith. When I joined the seminary and studied Theology, it became even more beautiful for me. A procession is a concrete expression of the reality of the Church as a pilgrim. Under the headship of Christ and with the Blessed Mother and the saints, the Church, the Body of Christ, untiringly makes a lifetime procession until all reach the fullness of sanctity in the promised Kingdom.

The processional element is very much stressed in today's Palm Sunday liturgical celebration. The ordinary Holy Mass actually begins with a procession (as the people gather inside the Church and the presider ascending to the sanctuary) and ends also with a procession (as the people are sent to go and the presider leaving the sanctuary). The act of procession, however, did not start from human beings but was first acted out by God himself. As the Son proceeds from the Father, we now see the Son making a procession to the holy city of Jerusalem, to the people of God. In other words, it is not us who started the procession towards God, but it is God who first acted out a procession for us so that we can make our procession towards God. Why did the Lord embrace this act of procession? It is to reveal that God never fails to search for the lost as what he has always done since in the beginning of creation when he searched for our lost parents in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8).

Today the liturgy also portrays the reality of the life of the Church as a pilgrim. The life of a Christian is a life that is always in between the tension of light and darkness. The Lord embraced this kind of life when he emptied himself and took the form of slave and thus became obedient even to death on a cross (Phil. 2:6-8). Thus, in the readings we heard today, echoes to us the joyous entry of the Lord in Jerusalem. We will all of a sudden encounter the suffering servant in Isaiah, the God who embraced death, and the Lord being a victim of jealousy and power. The sacred truth revealed by the readings is then culminated in the table of the Eucharist. St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that the altar *sacramentalizes* the cross. As in the cross, the blood of Christ separates from his body, which would cause death, so it is also in the altar where we encounter the separation of the body and blood of Christ in the form of bread and wine – a remembrance of the holy death of Christ.

The tension in the life of discipleship is also portrayed by the two characters in the Gospel reading: the woman who anointed the Lord with expensive oil and Judas who exchanged Jesus for a good sum of money.

The liturgy of Palm Sunday helps us to reflect about our own life journey as baptized people. In this journey it is inevitable to encounter joys and sorrows, different tides of time, and



different kinds of people like the woman and Judas. However, a true disciple of the Lord will never quit the journey of faith because there is one truth that remains the same from the beginning until the fullness of time – that God's love, as it is fully revealed by Christ, is present in all the journeys we will have in life. God's love is truth and this love comes to all, even if we are like the woman or Judas. The love of the Lord never changed even those people who welcomed him earlier, then cried for his crucifixion later, because God's love is truth, and truth does not change.

As we begin the Holy Week, let us not be weakened by the sufferings of the Lord, but let our contemplation of his sufferings be the source of strength to win over the trials in life until our procession reaches his Kingdom.