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**Palm Sunday Homily**  
Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help

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Today's liturgy is filled with great symbolism, but more importantly, is filled with paradox or contradiction – the paradox of triumph and death; of joy and suffering.

On the one hand, we have Jesus entering triumphantly in Jerusalem, throngs of people rejoicing – the longed-for Messiah has arrived. The promised Savior has finally come! Redemption is at hand! Shouts of “Hosanna” [a word which originally meant “save us”] and later became a shout of praise, fills the air. Jesus is being proclaimed their king outside the city gates as palm branches, which are ancient symbols of victory, are laid before him. Historically, kings coming back from a victorious battle are received in the same way, with palm branches. So there is great joy!

Jesus rides in on a donkey, another symbol of victory. Kings used horses for war, and when they rode into the city on a donkey, it was also a sign of victory, a sign of bringing peace. People would understand the symbolism. The victorious King is entering!

But the paradox is that the King's **triumphal entry** into Jerusalem will lead to the ultimate victory, the battle against sin and evil, accomplished only through Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection, by which He would redeem the world establishing not an earthly kingdom, but His everlasting Kingdom.

This is an important week for all of us. We enter into the **sacred drama** of Christ's greatest work. What **seems** to be Christ's **defeat** is actually his **victory**, the victory of **everlasting love**. His suffering and death proved beyond any doubt that His love for us has no limits. There is “no greater love than **to lay down his life** for his friends” (John 15:13). Jesus not only taught through His words, but more importantly through His actions. He was and is only motivated by love, love for us, even if it meant dying.

The Lord is inviting us this week to be with Him in a very intentional way – to put aside our “regular” lifestyle – and enter into the mystery of this love.

We heard in the Passion narrative from St. Mark, “Peter followed at a distance....” We heard also, “When he [Jesus] returned, he found them asleep.” We are like Peter sometimes, following Jesus at a distance. We don't want to get too close to Him. Is it because we are afraid of what He may ask? Is it because we fear of getting too close? Is it because He doesn't excite us too much? Is it because we are not convinced of what He offers to us? Is it because we do not know Him very well? Is our faith asleep, like the disciples who were asleep in the garden? Do we deny Him like Peter did? Will we remain close to Jesus all week?

It would be easy to reduce the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus to just an event that happened a long time ago. How sad would that be?

*“His Paschal mystery is a real event that occurred in our history, but it is unique: all other historical events happen once, and then they pass away, swallowed up in the past. The Paschal mystery of Christ, by contrast, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is—all that he did and suffered—participates in the divine eternity, transcends all times, and is made present in them all. The event of the Cross and Resurrection abides and draws everything toward life.”* [Catechism of Catholic Church #1085]

So as we see, Jesus continues to call all people to come together around Him. That is why we are gathered here each week. But above all, through His death on the cross and His Resurrection, He would accomplish the coming of His kingdom, not just eternally, but in our lives as individuals as well. “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” Into this union with Christ all people are called. [Catechism of Catholic Church #542]

Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Letter, the *Joy of the Gospel*, extended to us a challenging invitation: “*I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her since no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.*” [Evangelii Gaudium, The Joy of the Gospel, #2]

The celebration of Holy Week is all about accepting this invitation. I hear people often say that they wish they had a deeper relationship with the Lord. Often times it is because they do not make use of the opportunities available to them.

No amount of casual contact with God will draw us into this mystery of love. No amount of routine contact with the Lord can bring about this deeper encounter.

During the **first** Holy Week, two thousand years ago, Jesus achieved **victory** over sin and evil. During **this** Holy Week, He wants to **extend** that victory into **our lives**, into the parts of our lives that still **need** it, that still haven't learned how to live the paradox of Palm Sunday. Jesus **knows** what He wants to say to **each one** of us this week, uniquely and individually. So we cannot follow at a distance, like Peter.

In inviting us to come close to Him, Jesus wants to share with each of us the benefits of the cross. In doing so, then we will come to experience that the crosses we carry are not empty burdens with little value, but that every cross we carry can be carried into the world of God's redeeming love and embracing grace with meaning and hope.

We can never come to fully understand or grasp the depth of Christ's love for us, but each time we enter into this sacred week as a response to His saving love, we experience more deeply the benefits of this mystery – a love that transforms the suffering and sin in our own lives, allowing us to participate in his Paschal Mystery. This is precisely why each year Holy Week is a gift to us, to be unwrapped and opened.

As Catholics, we can **always** live the **paradox** of Palm Sunday. We can always find **joy, the joy of Christ's unlimited love**, even amidst the most **profound** sorrows. So this week, let us not watch at a distance, but give Jesus the **time and attention** He deserves, because whatever it is He wants to tell us, it will be **exactly** what we **most need** to hear. Have a Blessed Holy Week.