

Palm Sunday

1. We read the account of the Lord's Passion twice during Holy Week, today and on Good Friday. I suspect that somehow we associate today more with palms and the entrance of the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem than with the Lord's Passion. Nevertheless, we do anticipate Good Friday by reading it today.

2. As you may know, a study of the Seven Last Words of Jesus, the words he utters while dying on the cross, has been taking place at Our Lady Queen of Martyrs once a month over the past six months. At our last meeting we were talking about the suffering Jesus had to endure, and one woman questioned why this had to be so. God is all powerful, she said. Why then did he not bring about the healing, the salvation of our sinful world, in some other way? And, reflecting on the fact that the Father is sacrificing his own son, she said that she as a mother would never sacrifice her son.

3. What answer can we give to her question? Our first answer might be that we don't know if God could have saved the world in some other way. All we know is that he didn't, and we are not sure if we can say that he did not do that because he could not do it. But we tend to think that this is the case. We tend to think that God

would have spared his son this suffering if he could have done so. Therefore, the fact that he did not do so seems to tell us that his sons's suffering was the only way in which he could save our world. And having said that, we then try to find reasons why this was the case.

4. Why did the salvation of the world necessitate the suffering of God's Son? We can argue in this way: we humans need a brother who does for us what we can not do for ourselves---and that is to find our way out of a situation of alienation from God which we had created. We had turned away from God, and left to ourselves we could not reverse the situation. We could not turn back to God. Therefore, God had to come as one of us and do that for us. He had to say yes where we had said no. And since our alienation is a refusal of love for God, since it is an expression of hatred for God, a choice of ourselves over God, it had to be overcome by its opposite, which is love of God. For hatred cannot be overcome by hatred; hatred can be conquered only by its opposite, love. And that is what we see in the passion and death of the Lord. He suffers the hatred of his enemies and in doing so overcomes it. And that is why the Church's ancient hymn sings: Sweet the wood, sweet the nails.

5. We look at a horrible sight, a man crucified. It is something which we should not want to see. But we know why this man did this. We hear Paul's word: "He loved me and gave himself up for me" (Gal 2:20). And then this horrible scene is transformed for us into a reminder of God's love for us and his son's love for us. Yes, sweet the wood, sweet the nails.