

Passion – Palm Sunday – March 20, 2016

Five weeks ago, we received ashes on our foreheads. Those ashes did not just come from the bottom of someone's fireplace. They came as a result of blessed burned palms. Lent begins and ends with palms. What is it about palms?

Even as a kid I noticed that some palm leaves tended to show up in the unlikeliest of places: behind bedroom mirrors, tucked away in car visors, woven into crosses, and placed behind crucifixes and other holy pictures. Why are these palms so important to people and why give them so much prominence?

Perhaps the palms remind us of The Greatest Story Ever Told – a story so rich and so profound that we repeat it every year, hoping somehow to enter into it better. This great story isn't something that took place 2,000 years ago. The story continues in such a way that each of us is involved in our own way. We learn faith through ritual. The palms school us. It's not just our minds that need to be engaged here; it's also our hand and feet and voices too.

With all the characters that show up in this great story of Jesus, there are two questions that the palms suggest to us: Who is this Jesus that we remember and celebrate? And what does it mean to walk the path that he walked?

To the first question, we might ponder this: because we cannot avoid the suffering Christ as we walk through life, we keep the palm to remind us to honor him and be faithful to him in all his lowly servants. We continue to seek communion, because morning after morning, we need God's help to become ever more faithful disciples of God's sublime servant.

To the second question, we might ponder this: the palms invite us to enter the scene and find ourselves in one or more of the characters who walk with Jesus through his last day of mortal life. We take our place among the disciples, the crowd, the bit players, and the good and bad actors. And we learn from Jesus as he prays, as he speaks, as he is silent, as he suffers, and as he dies.

Lent begins with palms and ends with palms. The question is: what will we do with their promise and their challenge? In all times, there are moments when it seems that evil has won the day. In such moments of distress, there are three necessary prayers and they have three words each: "Lord, have mercy. Thee I adore. Into thy hand." If in times of distress we hold on to these, we shall do well.