

From Palm Sunday on the way to Easter

The procession with the palm branches to remind us of the joyful entry of Jesus into Jerusalem also reminds me of the opportunism that plagues and often grips us all. People praise each other when they can get something from each other. When that possible advantage disappears or the person has lost a certain status due to circumstances, we see how quickly this praise disappears, the person is simply pushed aside and even vilified. No, the hypocrisy of Palm Sunday is not a story of long past, but remains its full actuality. A lot of friendship and appreciation are feigned and endure as long as one can take advantage of them. How many efforts are made to have a selfie with a supposedly important person, but how many selfies are taken with a poor one meets on the street or with a person with a disability?

The people of Jerusalem saw in Jesus their new king and were already dreaming of all that He could provide for them. Of the message He had brought them they had understood nothing. They saw only their opportunistic advantages, and so they stood their waving palm branches and certainly trying to be in the front row to be seen. Jesus did know how pathetic and vain that all was and already saw as in a dream how He would be reviled by those same people a few days later and how Sunday's "Hosanna" would distort into a "Crucify Him" on Friday. It teaches us not to attach too much importance to the many beautiful words that people speak to and about us, because these words are ephemeral and can change key very quickly according to their convenience. And perhaps we should not attach too much importance to the negative things that are said about us, because they often say more about the person who says them than about ourselves.

The One who looks into our eyes sincerely and without any ulterior motives is God Himself. And it is also in His eyes that we may look and lay off all masks and makeup with which we want to show ourselves a little better than we really are. With God, all masks may and must come off and we are invited to be who we really

are and to implore His grace and mercy about it. We may appear before Him with our hurts, with our sins, with our faults that we cannot improve nor heal ourselves, but can confidently entrust to Him. It is He who helps us to discover the ideal image He has planted in us of Himself is all its beauty and greatness, and to find our true joy in it. And to be allowed to discover this image in others as well. Everything else is vanity, pure vanity.

Between Palm Sunday and Easter, much remains to be done, indeed, everything remains to be done. Again, it is not merely a remembrance of Christ's suffering, but also an invitation to live it with Him, from the observation that He also bore all the suffering that can happen to us. There is no suffering in the world with which He did not stand in solidarity, taking it on Himself and bearing it with Him. Here I want to dwell for a moment on the moment when Jesus was nailed to the cross after which the cross was erected. What must Jesus have been thinking about then? Perhaps of Judas who had betrayed Him. Is there anything worse that can happen to anyone than to be betrayed by his best friends? Jesus had put His full trust in Judas, otherwise He would not have entrusted him with the management of the money. One does not give that into the hands of the first, the best. What feeling He must have had at the moment when Judas appeared in the garden and betrayed Him with a kiss. Once again hypocrisy triumphs here by perverting a kiss as a sign of love into a sign of hatred. This was his "hosanna" which he distorted into his "crucify Him." And there hung the Son of Man, completely naked, stripped of the last shred of respect people could still give Him. When arrogance reigns supreme, any form of respect also fails. "But I am no longer a man, a worm, mocked and despised by men" (Psalm 22:7). Again, this is more than a story from the distant past, but daily people like Jesus are betrayed and humiliated, mocked and despised in this way. And it is Jesus who then meets them with his comfort and encouragement, with a compassion that has grown from his own deep

experience and therefore can only be authentic, stripped of all pretense.

But all that, as sad and discouraging as it may all sound, has not and is not the last word. Above all, the true "hosanna" breaks through that now culminates in an "alleluia" at the moment of the Resurrection. Not the opportunism and hypocrisy of fellow men have the last word, nor betrayal and total disrespect, but rather full confidence that God is there who never abandons man, even and especially not in death. What a wonderful perspective is given to us here, the perspective of resurrection. It is this perspective that we may cherish in the darkest days of our lives and that makes us realize that after every night, no matter how dark it may be, the sun will rise like a new dawn, to give a new perspective and a new meaning to our lives, perhaps in a completely different and totally unexpected way.

Jesus consciously did not cling to the pleasure that the cheering with palms tried to give Him. He knew that in this the true meaning of life could not be found. He let them rejoice and, in the meantime, moved on, knowing that through Golgotha He would find the way to the true joy, the joy of resurrection and eternal life that only God, His Father could give Him. Is it this joy that we seek in life, or do we still often allow ourselves to be blinded by the false pleasure that the world wants to present to us? It is for this reason that we speak of Easter peace and also Easter joy. For deep peace in our hearts also brings deep joy. Once this peace and joy has been allowed to find a place in our hearts, we will begin to see and experience everything that happens to us in a completely different way. Just as we took the time to prepare for Easter throughout Lent, we now also want to take the time, even liturgically some more time, to really let the reality of Easter penetrate us. To all, a good preparation for Easter and a blessed Easter season!

