



St Marylebone
Parish Church



8.30 Holy Communion BCP (1662)

Palm Sunday 2020

Readings:

The Epistle of St Paul to the Philippians 2:5-11

The Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew 27: 1-54

I should have done my best to dress up as a crowd of people waving Palm leaves: a donkey under one arm, a massive processional cross under the other...

We *should* be processing through the church garden of St Marylebone Parish Church. But we're not.

Palm Sunday is liturgical theatre par excellence.

Of course **all liturgy is 'performative'**, but especially in Holy Week.

Is it because, since time immemorial the clergy have been a bunch of failed actors? Probably!

But actually there are two much more compelling things to consider. And I want to consider the theatre of the liturgy, especially this year, as this year we are having to fast from this particular soul food. This is a good time to 1) ask 'what it's all about?' and 2) receive some of the gifts of the liturgy even if we can't live out the liturgy itself.

So the theatre of gathering and pretending to be the crowd on Palm Sunday: shouting what they shouted, waving stylised palms. There may even be a donkey or the odd tea towel left over from a shepherd at the nativity floating about.

Why?

We are fleshy beings. Our faith is not a matter of *ideas*. It is a relationship: us and God. We are beings of sight, sound, smell, taste, hearing – heart, mind and soul, and the liturgy reflects that. In the liturgy, as it has evolved over the centuries, God has continued to use it (for it is a gift from God) to meet us in amongst our messy, fleshy, human lives. God doesn't disregard our humanity, and meet us only in the things 'above'. God redeems our human experience – He uses sight and sound, smell and touch and taste to bless, nurture, and ultimately *save us*.

So the liturgy, and its theatre, is a gift from God that befits our nature. We should embrace it, treasure it, and revel in it. It is a gift for life.

So, finally, this gift – the liturgy, what does it actually do?

The liturgy is not a re-enactment. The best example is The Holy Eucharist. It is not a re-enactment of the Last Supper. It isn't a play. It isn't even simply a reminder or a memorial. It *is* Jesus. It *is* His Body and Blood. It *is* the Lamb of God.

Jesus didn't give us a sermon illustration, or a handy teaching-aid, or a re-enactment, or a theatrical prop. By the power of the Holy Spirit He gives us *Himself* in the mysterious presence of the Sacrament of His Body and Blood. A presence that exceeds our sight and taste, confounds our logic, and defies the constraints of time and place. But God never was bound by sense or time & place and the earthly order of things.

So where is all this leading?

In the liturgy we participate in God's own action. Time and place and sight and sound and **the normal rules of existence are suddenly not in charge, because the only rule of this game is Love.** A love so great that it leads to Calvary.

To participate in our little processions of Palm Sunday, to have our feet washed by the priest, to wait with Jesus in the garden at the altar of repose is, for a moment, to be on the edge of heaven and earth – the single point where all things meet in the heart of God. **These are spiritual realities. They are different from material realities, but they are no less real.**

But, and it's a big but... this year, the best we can do is watch it on here.

Well, maybe that will help us, for a change, to really embrace this great gift we

could otherwise take for granted. And in the meantime, do follow Holy Week on here, and in other places and here's a few other suggestions:

Watch a DVD – the Passion of the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth.

Jump in with Ignatian imaginative prayer of these world-changing events.

Perhaps read and inhabit a Passion account in the Gospels.

Use these videos on the days of this week, and especially the great three days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter.

Brothers and sisters, these days are our salvation.