

# Connecting With the Sunday Readings

## Passion (Palm) Sunday

People like to get something tangible from going to church. During this time of the year there are two give-away days, Ash Wednesday, and Palm Sunday. They are connected in two ways. Palm branches burned from one year are used as the ashes for the next, and they closely bookend the season of Lent.

We are given palms in memory of Jesus' final journey into Jerusalem because his journey's path was lined with palm-waving crowds. The Gospel reading highlights Jesus' popularity. This jubilant journey stands in stark contrast to the journey he made while carrying his own cross. The comparison of the two journeys says something about fidelity or faithfulness. We wonder how they could be "for" someone at one moment and "against" the same person a short time later. Humans are capable of radical shifts in allegiance. Maybe it depends on who's winning, though it shouldn't.

### A Gospel Word for the Home

#### Mark 11:1–10

They called him their king. They gathered around his final entry into Jerusalem much like they would have for King David. They were thinking that he was moving toward ascendancy and conquest. They were right, but it was not the ascendancy and conquest they were imagining. Their hopes and expectations were tied to social and political desires. But Jesus was not *that kind of king*. He had a different purpose.

In a few days he would ascend a "throne" of an entirely different kind, his cross. The whole Gospel according to Mark is written to adjust its listeners' attitudes and hopes, to redefine God's relationship with humans. God wants our hearts, our effort to help each other, our willingness to suffer for each other, should that be required. Family life is one of the places where this can happen. We place reminders of his death in our homes. We sign ourselves with the cross before we eat and retire. This is not, however, a morbid or negative matter. It's about the deeper meaning of life and its precious value to God, and to us. It is about living in peace and avoiding war, even the small wars that can happen in our homes. Palms can remind us of the special meaning we give to Jesus as our king.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

## Parent Survival

People bring palms home after Mass. They can be considered a special kind of seasonal decoration, but there may be a better way to think about them. They can remind us of what happened to Jesus in the days following his entry into Jerusalem. There is a “hard edge” to our faith. We believe in a Messiah who suffered for us. He died for us out of love. Parents know this kind of love in all that they do for their children.

The palms brought home can serve as a reminder that our lives of loving one another (including ourselves), is of great value. In the end, in our crazy universe, the only thing that counts is the love between us. Jesus said as much at the Last Supper, which we commemorate this Holy Week. We recall him washing the feet of his meal companions. There was our *king*, on his knees, before them, and now before us.

## Car or Meal Talk

Explain to your children the meaning of the palms that are part of our religious ritual. If we don't, they are likely to think of them as merely ... palms.

## One-Line Prayer

Christ Our King,  
We affirm that you are our king to whom  
we owe our very lives!  
Amen.