

“Free to be humble” Mat 21:1-9

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, “The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, “Say to the daughter of Zion, “Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.”” The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

We have never experienced anything like that. We have never even witnessed anything like that. None of us has. Therefore, it is hard for us even to imagine how it happened.

We can only pray that the Holy Spirit working through the Word would open all the power of our imagination and help us to picture that situation. What am I talking about?

About the same thing that Zechariah the prophet and the priest was foretelling already five centuries before Jesus’ time. About the Saviour who would come in a very unexpected and humble way.

Zechariah wrote the words which Matthew later quotes in our today’s Gospel reading: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zechariah 9:9)

Today we read how this prophesy was fulfilled. Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives. The week before the great festival of Passover. When thousands and thousands of pilgrims travelled to Jerusalem. There was unrest and eager expectations in the air. You could feel it. Why?

For Jesus from Nazareth, the man whom God had anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power, who had gone about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, who had just raised the Lazarus from the dead, was coming to Jerusalem.

Accompanied by many of His disciples and people from the surrounding villages, He was entering Jerusalem, greeted as a mighty victor who returns after triumphing over his enemies. There was something unreal and very powerful happening.

The crowds spread their cloaks on the road, others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. No one asked them to do it. No one organized Jesus' visit to Jerusalem. All of this was happening on its own...

The crowds went before Jesus and followed Him shouting: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" How strange!

You know what 'hosanna' means? Help, or save, I pray! Who did they pray to? The Son of David. That wasn't a neutral expression. God Yahweh had promised to the famous king David that one day God Himself will put a descendent of David on his throne, and that His Kingdom would have no end.

Jewish people had been waiting for this to happen for nine centuries. And all the prophecies indicated that this could be the time. This must be the time. Besides, this Jesus... What a powerful man He was! No one could stand in His way.

He had done such mighty miracles, healings, feeding of thousands, commanding the creation, and His opponents never stood a chance against Him. And now He is coming to Jerusalem. He is accompanied and greeted as a great king.

Even more than just a king. As Messiah, or Christ, the One whom the Lord God Himself has appointed and send to save His people. People are as excited as witnessing as their new king arrives to receive His Kingdom.

But there is something that doesn't fit the picture. Jesus arrives riding ... on a donkey. Humble and lowly. There are no guards around Him, no security, as it would be fitting for such important individual.

The truth is, he doesn't need it. Why? Because He Himself knows the thoughts of all people. He knows what everyone in Jerusalem is thinking. Even more. He is the Almighty, the Holy One, and even as He humbly rides on a donkey, He is in absolute control of everything that is happening on that day.

On one hand, He is the Holy One of Israel, a consuming fire, He "looks on the earth and it trembles, He touches the mountains and they smoke!" (Ps 104:32) On the other hand, "a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not quench (Mat 12:20) All powerful and incredibly humble.

What were all those many people hoping for on that day? What do you think? Why so much joy? What about Jesus' disciples? They had their worries, – who will get to sit at Jesus' right and who at the left, when Jesus begins His reign?

What were His followers thinking? Will He now feed us all, and heal us all, and we will have no problems anymore? Will He take care of everything that we may need?

What about the leaders of the Jews? Will we lose our control and our positions of influence when this Jesus comes? Will things still be the way we want them, or will they change? What then?

What a mix of passions! Joy and hopes, hatred and envy, deep longings and yet deeper concerns ... all of that in one place. But there is something that unites all these people and all these passions.

They all missed the main point. They all misunderstood what was happening. They all were primarily concerned with ... who can guess? Yes, with themselves. Not with Jesus, but with themselves.

But what about Jesus? What was Jesus thinking? Was it for Him a celebration or a tragedy? How bittersweet was this welcome for Him? Sure, on that day those were shouts of joy.

But those shouts of joy will change by the end of the week. They will still be as loud as today... but... not “hosanna” anymore. Instead He will hear “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

His heart must have been torn in pieces... Jesus knew what people were longing for in their hearts. He had come to fulfil these deepest longings. He was even ready to pay the ultimate price humbly serving us.

Just not in a way that people understood or expected. Let us think about ourselves for a while. What are our longings? Where is our focus? Do we truly understand what is happening in the Church, or do we tend to forget?

We live in the times of change. I am talking about our congregation. So many things have changed and perhaps many more will change? What are we concerned about? About ourselves or about Jesus?

How do we pray?” “Let your will happen’ or ‘let my will happen’, for this is my church? The fact is that if a congregation is still alive, things never are ‘our way’. Because we are so different. We come from so different backgrounds, we come with so different longings and different concerns.

We live in the time of change. For some they may appear more significant, for some less significant. But there is something new for all of us. Some may prefer to gather in one church building, some may prefer the other.

Some may prefer to meet earlier, some may prefer to meet later. Some may prefer one kind of music, some may prefer the other. Some may want to dwell in the house of the Lord as long, as possible, some may want to get out fast.

Some may prefer one pastor, some may prefer the other, some may prefer community, some may prefer solitude, some may come to engage and chat, some may come to rest and to be left alone. We all are so different.

But if we focus on these things, if we come here expecting things to be our way we miss the main point, like people back then. They were concerned with themselves more than with Jesus and more than with others.

That is what our fallen nature is like. Focused on ourselves. This is, why Paul wrote to Philippians the famous words that we heard today: “Have this mind

among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who ... emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant.

[Therefore, you too] do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

It may not be that easy. I know. It is hard not to be concerned with ourselves first. Especially is something doesn't go 'my way'. Because we all have our longings and concerns.

But there is something we need to know and remember forever. This is important! None of us deserves God's grace and love. None of us deserves to be a member of the Church, that is the body of Christ. None of us deserves God's forgiveness, the gift of the Holy Spirit and eternal life. None of us.

We all are here only thanks to our God's undeserved grace and mercy!

Nevertheless, as Jesus came to Jerusalem, ready to sacrifice Himself to save the people who either selfishly cared about themselves, or who outright hated Him, similarly He comes today to us. To save us and to bless us.

He still comes to us humble and lowly. Not on a donkey anymore, but still in a humble and ordinary way. He comes to us when we gather in His name. He comes to us when your pastor speaks the words of forgiveness by the command of Jesus. That's Him who says: "I forgive you all your sins!"

He comes when you pastor speaks on behalf of Jesus, and when we are fed by the very body and blood of our Lord in the Holy Sacrament. He still comes to us, humble and lowly, just as we haven't change much.

He comes, and He knows our thoughts and our deepest longing. He comes to fulfil them. Not in way that we may expect, not giving us what we may prefer, but by giving us much more, more than we can comprehend.

He gives us such great things and makes as participants of such majestic realities so that only we could stop focusing on ourselves but could focus on Him and on the people next to us.

Exchanging His life to yours, He makes each of you infinitely precious and important. He makes you members of His own family. He grants you peace and security, and He promises to care for you and to have you with Him.

We are free not to worry about our importance, or being in control, or getting things our way, or about our future, for Jesus takes care of everything. We are free to trust Him and consider others as more significant than ourselves and to look for their interests first.

And why not, if Jesus considers you as more significant than Himself, and if He looks for your interests first. I pray that as Jesus comes to us today, the Holy Spirit would change our hearts and our minds that we too could, both to appreciate God's undeserved mercy and only to learn how to imitate our humble Lord. Amen.