

# Opening the Word: The pain of spending Palm Sunday apart



This year, there will be no public processions. This year, there will be no waving of palms in the parish vestibule. This year, there will be silence in churches throughout the world, a priest or two offering the holy sacrifice of the Mass in an otherwise empty church.

In a typical year, Palm Sunday is the porch of Holy Week. We join the crowds in crying out in praise, awaiting the coming of the King of Glory.

We listen to the prophecy of the suffering servant, who heals the wounds of the world through an unimaginable obedience.

We sing aloud the words of Psalm 22, the piercing words Our Lord cried out upon the cross, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” (Ps 22:2a).

We contemplate St. Paul’s hymn of praise to the God who did not seek to hold onto power but emptied himself, to the point of death. This is the God-man who will be lifted up, praised as the Lord of the living and the dead.

We praise our King and our Glory through the proclamation of his glorious passion, the drama that describes why we’re gathered in this church at all.

[April 5 – Palm Sunday  
of the Lord’s Passion](#)

Mt 21:1-11  
Is 50:4-7  
Ps 22:8-9, 17-18,  
19-20, 23-24  
Phil 2:6-11  
Mt 26:14, 27:66

And then, we celebrate the holy Eucharist, the memorial of Christ's merciful and tender sacrifice. We bend our knees before his glorious presence, the presence of the glorious Lord, who still dwells among us.

All of this will still happen. Most of us won't be there.

We won't be there either as the oils are blessed by the bishop of our diocese during Holy Week, the oils that will be used to heal the sick, anoint catechumens, mark those newly baptized with the chrism of salvation.

We won't be there on Holy Thursday as we commemorate the night that our Lord gave to us the most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist when he descended to wash the feet of the Twelve.

We won't be there to keep watch that night before the Blessed Sacrament.

We won't be there on Good Friday as time itself stops, as we listen once more to the Passion of St. John, as we adore the glorious wood of the cross that has redeemed the world, as we receive already consecrated hosts (more like waybread this day than any other), as we shed tears for what we have done and what we have failed to do.

And we won't be there that glorious Easter night, the mother of all Vigils, that dazzling night where we remember once more that divine love defeats death. Light conquers darkness. Alleluia, indeed.

We won't be there.

On Easter Day, there will be a chance to think about the gifts of this absence, the way that it has increased our desire for belonging to Christ's body. We'll long, more than we ever have perhaps, to receive his Body and Blood.

But on this Palm Sunday, let's recognize that it hurts. We'll undoubtedly follow along with these liturgies at home. We'll pray the Divine Office, contemplate the mysteries of salvation through the Rosary.

But we won't be there. We won't be there because our neighbor is suffering, because there is an illness that threatens the very common good. We won't be there because that ash put on our foreheads what seems like a lifetime ago is not an empty sign. We are dust, we are ash. We are.

And so, let's join our voices with Christ's this week. We feel forsaken, alone, absent. Those who are dying in hospitals right now, away from loved ones, feel abandoned.

Palm Sunday in the Year of COVID-19 means acknowledging this forsakenness, this loneliness, the bitterness of absence.

If Our Lord can cry out in pain on the cross, then we can, too.

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