

The Palm/Entry Narrative – Luke 19:28-40 (41-46)

The Passion Narrative – Luke 22:14-23:56

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Grace and peace dear saints and sinners, from Father God, Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit. It's Palm Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week. Let's pray:

Today, we take our place in the triumphal entry, singing our hosannas, and waving our palms. They've become the distinctive characteristics of this day and the way we mark the beginning of Holy Week. That's not, however, what I want to focus on today. Today I want to talk to you about a different entry into Holy Week. I want to talk about tears and weeping.

For some of you the mention of tears and weeping is enough to cause you to begin welling up. Others of you begin stiffening up, fighting back the emotions, memories, and tears. Some of you have eyes that are dry and well insulated from tears and weeping. Others of you have eyes that are dry because you've cried yourself dry. You've run out of tears even though the reasons for weeping remain.

You probably didn't come here today wanting to hear this. The experiences behind our tears and weeping are neither easy nor comfortable, but then neither is the experience of Holy Week.

You'd probably prefer the triumphal entry, palms and hosannas. Why focus on tears and weeping? Well, I have a question for you. What does St Luke have to say about all that when his account of the gospel [Luke 19:28-40] is the one we hear today?

What does Luke say about the palms? Nothing.

What does Luke say about the hosannas? Nothing. Neither appear in Luke's gospel account.

What does Luke say about tears and weeping? Nothing, if we read only today's assigned portion of the gospel [Luke 19:28-40]. That's why I took the liberty of extending our first gospel reading to include verses 41-46. The very next verse after today's assigned gospel, Craig read, "As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it" [Luke 19:41]. Luke's account of the gospel is the only one in which Jesus sees the city and weeps.

Luke doesn't describe the usual triumphal entry that we're used to. Luke describes the tearful entry. If tears and weeping are Jesus' entry into Holy Week maybe tears and weeping should be our entry into Holy Week. I'm not saying we're wrong to sing our hosannas and wave the palms, but in the context of St Luke's gospel, tears and weeping seem more authentic and meaningful. It's also a more vulnerable entry and vulnerability is always at the heart of Holy Week.

Tears and weeping flow through Luke's entry narrative [Luke 19:28-46] and continue to flow through his passion narrative [Luke 22:14-23:56]. St Luke records three episodes of weeping in today's two gospel readings.

First, "As [Jesus] came near and saw the city, he wept over it." Jesus' tears formed a river of love, compassion, and heartbreak flowing between him and Jerusalem. We know about Jerusalem but it's not about only a particular city. It's more about a condition. It's about our ignorance of "the things that make for peace" and blindness to "the time of [our] visitation from God." So yes, it is Jerusalem but it's also Tripoli, Caracas, Mexico, Cape Town, Raqqa, and a thousand other places of violence today. It's about prejudice against the immigrant, promotion of income inequality, and the destructiveness of fear and hate-based political ideologies. It's about our refusal to love our enemy and sometimes even our neighbour. Jesus sees it all and he weeps.



The second record of weeping concerns Peter. He denies Jesus three times, the cock crows and, Luke tells us, Peter “went out and wept bitterly” [Luke 22:62]. His tears flow as he recognises the reality of his life. He has not only denied Jesus, he has also denied himself. I’ve wept those tears and I’ll bet you have too. They are tears confessing that our life is not what we want it to be. They are the tears that tell us we are lost. But I thank God for bitter weeping because they are also the tears by which God calls us home, and the way home always passes through Holy Week.

The final episode of weeping that Luke records is on the way of the cross. Among the crowd following Jesus were some women beating their breasts and wailing for Jesus. Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children” [Luke 23:28]. Through these women he is speaking to the entire city and to us. The kind of weeping he implores is not grounded in self-pity or selfishness. Rather, it is weeping that recognises our complicity in sin and the gravity of our situation.

And yet, it’s as if Jesus is also saying, “I have wept for you, now weep for yourselves that your tears and my tears may mingle and become one.” It’s as if our eyes now weep with the tears of Jesus. That’s what it means to enter Holy Week through tears and weeping.

A tearful entry into Holy Week means we must first acknowledge the reality of our lives and world. We can’t turn away from the experiences and sources of our tears. This is our Holy Week work and it is difficult and painful.

Some of us weep tears that are wet and run down our cheeks. Others weep tears that never wet the eyes. Wet or dry, they are both real. Both express the same truth; our heart has been pierced. Jesus' heart was pierced when he saw Jerusalem. Peter's heart was pierced when the cock crowed. The women's hearts were pierced at the full recognition of Jesus' and their situation.

Sometimes our heart is pierced with sorrow, grief, and death. Sometimes guilt, regret, or disappointment. Other times our heart is pierced by the pain of the world and the suffering of another human being. Some hearts are pierced with the loss of what could've been, dreams that didn't come true, wishes unfulfilled, or promises not kept. Others are pierced by burdens and the weight of life, fear, change, and uncertainty. Whatever it is and however it happens we've all suffered. We've all wept.

Every time I come to station thirteen on the Stations of the Cross, I feel my heart pierced once again. It's the station in which Jesus is taken from the cross and placed in the arms of his mother, and it reminds me of Michelangelo's surreal sculpture, *Pieta*, in St Peter's Basilica, Rome. My heart is pierced and the tears flow. I've stood with some of you at the deathbed or graveside of your loved one wanting so much to offer comforting words, but can manage only tears. Like Peter I have wept over my broken promises. Sometimes I want to pray for the pain of the world but there are no words, only tears. Some nights my heart is pierced by exhaustion and I weep thinking about how soon tomorrow will arrive and how long the to do list is.

They're not just my stories. They're your stories as well. I'm no different to you. The facts or circumstances may be different but the tears are the same.

So, what are your tears; the ones you've cried and the ones you've denied, the ones that never seem to end and the ones you need to weep but just aren't there, the ones that scare you and the ones you can't explain and don't understand? In what ways has your heart been pierced? What's behind your tears and weeping?

Whatever your tears and weeping may be about, let them become your entry into Holy Week. To push back our tears or to wipe them away is to deny ourselves the power of this Holy Week and the joy of Easter life. Let this Holy Week transform your tears into the holy waters of baptism; waters of cleansing and release, waters of forgiveness and healing, waters of rebirth and new life.

Don't hold back! Let your tears flow and mingle with Jesus' tears, that you may celebrate the joy of living as one saved because he wept, bled, and died for you; for the sake of Father's love for you. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

