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Spirituality



Christians carry palm fronds as they walk the traditional path that Jesus took on his last entry into Jerusalem during the Palm Sunday procession on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem April 2, 2023. (OSV News/Debbie Hill)



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Today, evil seems so present and powerful that the faithful cry out with Jesus, "My God, why have you abandoned us?" (Mark 15:34). In his account of Jesus' passion, Luke invites us to enter into the scene to learn what Jesus teaches his disciples, from then until now.

Luke's passion account repeats every title by which Jesus has been called: Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah, Christ and King of the Jews. Jesus acknowledged that those words were correct, but not the meaning his interrogators attached to them. As he would demonstrate to the end, God's love is God's only genuine power in the world, one that works through humble service, nothing more.

Today's Gospel opens with Jesus at the table with his disciples. Clearly aware that he was on the brink of suffering, he summarized his mission as he blessed and broke the bread. He equated the bread with his body and the cup with his blood: his entire self. As he had done throughout his mission, he offered his whole self to them. Following the breaking of bread, Jesus gave his disciples the most costly commandment of all: "Do this in memory of me."

Palm Sunday

April 13, 2025

Luke 19:28-40
Isaiah 50:4-7
Psalm 22
Philippians 2:6-11
Luke 22:14-23:56

This command referred to far more than a ritual with bread and wine. It asserted that communion in him implied demonstrating God's love and offering their own lives for others, all the way to the cross (Luke 9:23-27, 44-45, 18:31-34).

As Luke tells the story, it was in response to an argument about who was the greatest that Jesus explained himself to them one more time. Their argument mirrored their reactions to Jesus' teaching about his impending suffering and death. Now, immediately after breaking the bread of his life with him, they violated his command by posturing for importance. Jesus, accustomed to them as he was, responded to their dispute saying: "I am among you as one who serves, and thus, the greatest among you act as servants." After that, he led them to the Mount of Olives, where he was used to praying.

In days past, Jesus had taught his disciples to pray. Now, they watched him in a most passionate exchange with his Abba. Knowing that he was sent to embody the love of God and expose the impotence of lies, violence and blatant evil, he consecrated himself again as he had by his baptism and with the bread. He prayed to do God's will, to reveal the power of divine love through his seemingly disastrous confrontation with the power of darkness.

From the supper to the cross, Jesus' faith was tested as never before. His own emotions as he was arrested, tortured, lied about and finally condemned surely deepened his compassion for the fearful disciples who ran, unable to entrust themselves to God's power. As he was arrested, Jesus proclaimed the opposite of what he had announced about the nearness of the Reign of God. In an announcement that may have terrified even himself, he admitted: "Now is the hour, the time for the power of darkness."

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In that darkness, religious and civil authorities goaded him to answer the most important question of a human life: Who do you say that you are? Was he the Messiah? His responses indicated that his way of being Messiah was beyond their comprehension. He called himself the Son of Man and they asked, "Are you the Son of God?" Might his enigmatic response, "You say that I am," have admitted that their charge was true? It could have been a declaration that his very vulnerability revealed an image of God that they wouldn't — or couldn't — grasp.

We know the rest: With trumped up charges and a fanatical mob, they arranged for his crucifixion. He responded by praying for those who hated him and proclaimed salvation to a criminal crucified with him. According to Luke, Jesus' last words were,

"Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit." That was part two of "Thy will be done." He kept hope that the Father was there for him, even to the darkest end.

Now, while our world is at war, when the poor and vulnerable are abandoned and lies are offered as our daily bread, we feel we are again in the hour of darkness. Celebrating this Holy Week invites us to learn who we are as disciples. Jesus has left us his core prayer, and when we pray it, we consecrate ourselves to be for others, like Jesus.

This story appears in the **Lent 2025** feature series. View the full series.