



The Holy See

XVI WORLD YOUTH DAY

PALM SUNDAY

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

8 April 2001

1. "*Hosanna!*", "*Crucify him!*". The significance of the two events we are recalling at this Sunday's liturgy could be summed up in these words, probably shouted by the same crowd in the space of a few days.

With the acclamation "Blessed is he who comes!", in a burst of enthusiasm, the people of Jerusalem waved palm branches and greeted Jesus as he entered the city riding on an ass. With the words: "Crucify him!", shouted twice in a crescendo of fury, the multitude clamoured for the Roman governor to condemn the accused as he stood silently in the *Praetorium*.

Our celebration therefore begins with a "*Hosanna!*" and ends with a "*Crucify him!*". *The palm of triumph* and *the cross of the Passion*: this is not a contradiction; rather, it is the heart of the mystery that we want to proclaim. Jesus gave himself up voluntarily to the Passion; he was not crushed by forces greater than himself. He freely faced crucifixion and in death was triumphant.

By searching the Father's will, he realized that his "hour" had come and he accepted it with the free obedience of the Son and with infinite love for human beings: "When Jesus knew that this hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13: 1).

2. Today we look at Jesus who is nearing the end of his life and is presented as the Messiah long awaited by the people, sent by God in his name to bring peace and salvation, although in a different way from what contemporaries were expecting.

Jesus' work of salvation and liberation continues down the centuries. That is why the Church, which firmly believes him to be present, even if invisibly, never tires of acclaiming him in her praise and adoration. Our assembly therefore proclaims once again: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!".

3. The reading of the Gospel passage has set before our eyes the *terrible scenes of Jesus' Passion*: his physical and moral suffering, Judas' kiss, the disciples' desertion, the trial before Pilate, the insults and scorn, the condemnation, the sorrowful way, the crucifixion. Finally, the most mysterious suffering: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?". A loud cry, then death. Why all this? The beginning of the Eucharistic prayer will give us the answer: "Though he was sinless, he suffered willingly for sinners. Though innocent, he accepted death to save the guilty. By his dying he has destroyed our sins. By his rising he has raised us up to holiness of life" (*Preface*). Our celebration thus expresses gratitude and love to the One who sacrificed himself for us, to the Servant of God who, as the prophet said, was not rebellious, did not turn backwards, gave his back to the smiters and did not hide his face from shame and spitting (cf. Is 50: 4-7).

4. However, in reading the account of the Passion, the Church does not only consider Jesus' sufferings; she approaches this mystery, trembling yet confident, knowing that her Lord is risen. *The light of Easter reveals the great teaching contained in the Passion*: life is affirmed through the sincere gift of self to the point of suffering death for others, for the Other.

Jesus did not understand his earthly existence as a search for power, as a race for success or a career, as a desire to dominate others. On the contrary, he gave up the privileges of his equality with God, took the form of a servant, became like men and was obedient to the Father's plan unto death on the cross. Thus he left his disciples and the Church a valuable lesson: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12: 24).

5. For some years now Palm Sunday has become *World Youth Day, your Day*, dear young people who have come here from the various parishes of the Diocese of Rome and from other parts of the world: together with you, I also greet with affection and hope your peers who today, in the various local Churches, are celebrating the 16th World Youth Day, the first of the new millennium.

I particularly greet the young people of the *Canadian Delegation*, led by Cardinal Ambrozic, Archbishop of Toronto, who are here with us to receive the Cross around which all the young people from every continent will gather on the next World Youth Day in 2002. Once again I forcefully point out to each and every one the Cross of Christ as the path of life and salvation, the way that leads to the palm of triumph on the day of resurrection.

What do we see on the Cross standing before us, which for 2,000 years the world has not ceased to question and the Church to contemplate? We see Jesus, the Son of God who became man in order to restore man to God. He who is without sin is now crucified before us. He is free, despite

being nailed to the wood. He is innocent, even under the inscription stating the reason for his sentence. None of his bones were broken (cf. Ps 34: 21), because he is the supporting column of a new world. His tunic was not torn (cf. Jn 19: 24), because the body of the Lord of life, who conquered death, cannot undergo corruption.

6. Dear young people, Jesus died and is risen; *he now lives for ever!* He gave his life. But no one took it from him; he gave it "for us" (Jn 10: 18). Life came to us through his cross. Through his death and resurrection the Gospel triumphed and the Church was born.

As we confidently enter the new century and the new millennium, dear young people, the Pope repeats to you the words of the Apostle Paul: "If we have died with Jesus, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him" (2 Tm 2: 11). For Jesus alone is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (cf. Jn 14: 6).

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? The Apostle has also given us the answer: "I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8: 38-39).

Praise and glory to you, O Christ, Word of God, Saviour of the world!