



The Holy See

PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

13 April 2003

18th World Youth Day

"Behold, your mother!" (Jn 19,27)

1. *"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"* (Mk 11: 9).

The liturgy of Palm Sunday is like a *formal entrance* into Holy Week. It combines *two contrasting moments*: the welcome of Jesus in Jerusalem and the drama of the Passion; the festive "Hosanna" and the repeated cry: "Crucify him!"; the triumphal entry and the apparent defeat through death on the Cross. The liturgy thus anticipates the "hour" in which the Messiah was to suffer greatly, to be put to death, and on the third day to rise again (cf. Mt 16: 21), and prepares us to live fully the paschal mystery.

2. *Rejoice, O daughter of Jerusalem! / Behold, your king comes to you"* (Zec 9: 9). In welcoming Jesus, the city with the vivid memory of David rejoices; the city of the prophets, many of whom were to suffer martyrdom for the truth; the *city of peace*, which, down through the ages, has known violence, war and deportation.

In a certain way, Jerusalem can be considered the *city-symbol of humanity*, especially at this dramatic beginning of the third millennium that we are living. The Palm Sunday rites thus acquire a special eloquence of their own. The words of the Prophet Zechariah ring out as a consolation: *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! / Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! / Behold, your king comes to you; / triumphant and victorious is he, / humble and riding on an ass, / ...the battle bow shall be cut off, / and he shall command peace to the nations"* (Zec 9: 9-10). Today we are celebrating, for today Jesus, the *King of peace*, enters Jerusalem.

3. Then, on the descent from the Mount of Olives, *the children and young people of Jerusalem* ran to meet Christ, acclaiming him and waving festive branches of olive and palm.

Meeting him today are *the young people of the whole world*, who are celebrating the 18th World Youth Day in every diocesan community.

I greet you with great affection, dear young people of Rome, and also you, who have come on pilgrimage from various countries. I greet the many *people in charge of youth ministry* who are taking part in the Convention on the World Youth Days, organized by the Pontifical Council for the Laity. And how could we fail to express our fraternal solidarity to your peers who are so sorely tried by war and violence in Iraq, in the Holy Land and in various other regions of the world?

Today, with faith and joy, we acclaim Christ who is our "King": the King of *truth, freedom, justice and love*. These are the four "pillars" on which it is possible to build true peace, just as Bl. Pope John XXIII wrote 40 years ago in his Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. In spirit, *I present to you, young people of the whole world*, this historical Document, which is more timely than ever: read it, meditate on it, strive to put it into practice. Then you will be "blessed", *because you will be true children of the God of peace* (cf. Mt 5: 9).

4. Peace is the gift of Christ, which he obtained for us with the sacrifice of the Cross. To achieve it effectively it is necessary to climb with the divine Teacher up to Calvary. And who can guide us better in this ascent than Mary who, as she stood at the foot of the Cross, was given to us as our mother through the faithful apostle, St John? To help the young discover this marvellous spiritual reality, I chose as the *theme of my Message for World Youth Day* this year the words of the dying Christ: "*Behold, your mother!*" (Jn 19: 27). Accepting this testament of love, John opened his home to Mary (cf. Jn 19: 27), that is, he welcomed her into his life, sharing with her a completely new spiritual closeness. The *intimate bond with the Mother of the Lord* will lead the "beloved disciple" to become the apostle of that Love that he drew from the Heart of Christ through the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

5. "*Behold, your mother!*" Jesus addresses these words to each of you, dear friends. He also asks you to take Mary as your mother "into your home", to welcome her "as one of yours", because "she will discharge her ministry as a mother and train you and mould you until Christ is fully formed in you" (*Message for WYD*, n. 3; *ORE*, 19 March 2003, p. 6). May Mary make it so that you respond generously to the Lord's call, and persevere with joy and fidelity in the Christian mission! Down through the centuries, how many young people have heard this invitation and how many continue to hear it in our time, too.

Young people of the third millennium, do not be afraid to offer your lives as a total response to Christ! It is he, he alone who changes life and the history of the world.

6. *"Truly this man was the Son of God!"* (Mk 15: 39). We have once again listened to the clear profession of faith expressed by the centurion, who *"saw that he thus breathed his last"* (*ibid.*). What he had seen prompted the surprising witness of the Roman soldier, the first to proclaim that this crucified man *"was the Son of God"*.

Lord Jesus, we too *have "seen" how you suffered and died for us*. Faithful until the last, you rescued us from death with your death. With your Cross you have redeemed us.

O Mary, sorrowful Mother, you are a silent witness of these decisive moments for the history of salvation.

Give us your eyes so that on the face of the crucified One, disfigured by pain, we may recognize the image of the glorious Risen One.

Help us to embrace him and entrust ourselves to him, so that we be made worthy of his promises.

Help us to be faithful today and throughout our lives. Amen!

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