

Sermon from Bishop Daniel Gutiérrez
Palm Sunday 2020 at Christ Church, Philadelphia
April 4, 2020

This Palm Sunday is indeed glorious. It may not be what we envisioned; however, it is the opportunity to create a new entry into a new world that we so longed for. Yes, it is glorious because God is working through you in ways that are yet to be seen. Palm Sunday contains one of the most inspiring and incarnational passages.

Perhaps it no longer moves us, because we have heard it so often, it has become familiar. Yet, the entry in Jerusalem connects the Old and New Testament. It leads us with Jesus to Calvary, and in the process, provides a glimpse of heaven and, more importantly, this opportunity for heaven on earth.

In the Old Testament, the Prophets told of this day: Yahweh, leaving the temple, yet one day, glory would return. On that day, a humble king would come riding on the foal of a donkey. The truth continues because on that first Palm Sunday, from the Mount of Olives, our Lord's route led directly to the cross.

St. John reveals in Revelation that he was given a glimpse of heaven where The King sits in splendor, and a myriad of saints are waving palm branches. This beautiful and hopeful promise that despite all our difficulties, we are given the assurance that we are never abandoned. At the beginning of today's Gospel, we find hopeful words.

Yet more than hope, we see that we are part of God's plan. And our participation is an essential part of the realization of God's love. Jesus instructs two of his disciples to do something for him. Jesus tells them to bring him a donkey and her foal because "the Lord needs them." Our entire relationship with God is one of giving and receiving.

God takes what we give and making it holy. Our receiving the gifts from God and then sharing and participating in God's sacred work in the world. God always makes our lives part of the story. The story begins in Genesis: Let US make humankind in our image, according to our likeness. God is with us, and we are with God.

The Old Testament speaks of God's attempt to be in covenant with us, and it hinges on either our rejection or affirmation. The New Covenant is sealed on Mary's declaration and Joseph's confirmation. It continues in a borrowed manger in a borrowed stable. Jesus approaches John in the Jordan, human hands place water on the holy body and the Holy Spirit hovers, and then the heavens break open. Jesus asks for a boat from where to preach, tells the woman at the well, "give me something to drink" He asks a young boy for loaves and fishes from which to feed the thousands. He borrows a room for the meal that feeds and sends us to this day.

His body is laid in a borrowed grave. In the radiance of Easter morning, Mary Magdalene is told to go and tell us what she has seen. Jesus then entrusts us to proclaim the world of this

Good News. I want you to feel and know the trust and confidence the Lord places in us. Jesus asks of us: because the Lord needs it.

When the Lord asks, and we respond, it is covered in holiness, beauty, and peace. The Lord is still asking us to bring our gifts to God's holy work in the world. Once you set your face toward God and respond, we glimpse the kingdom. We often stand at the threshold of light and darkness. What is next?

During this time of separation, anxiety, fear, and isolation, we have the opportunity. God is working. We may not know precisely what is happening, and that is ok. What we need to recognize are the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to go forward with courage, faith, and hope.

A new story is being told, and you are part of the story. The Lord needs us. In your community, in this diocese, and in your own homes. Now is the sacred opportunity. All our gifts are part of God's holy and unfolding work. God is asking, Jesus is sending. To be connected to God and one another in ways we could not imagine.

To change relationships and build connections with one another. To once again deepen our way, as a people, of being with God. In this time of distance, let's prepare for that day when we will together once again, and we can begin anew. Where revenge is replaced by forgiveness, division by unity, suspicion by understanding, the hardness of heart by compassion. Where we support one another instead of materialism and individualism. To bring love to a world that is being defined by hate. Right now, the Lord is once again asking us to bring him something. The Lord is asking, what will bring? Let us bring our hearts, our love, and our life.

May we understand what it means to be human once again. For the story is not complete, hope is emerging, and a new world is within our sight. Yes, from the beginning of time, we have always been part of God's divine plan. Let us show this community that we are out to do the world good. Life in God is a gift.

Together on this blessed Palm Sunday, commit to creating a new holy city, and a new life. Then let us shout, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna.

Fulton Sheen
Robert Barron