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"Behold, your king comes to you, meek and riding on an ass, a beast of burden" (Matt 21:5).

Matt 21:1-11; Isa 50:4-7; Ps 22; Phil 2:6-11; Matt 26:14--27:66

The Greek word for liturgy is *leitourgia*, which literally means "work for the people," a literal translation of the two words *litos ergos* or "public service". Before the church sacralized it, the word was about the taking part in the political and civic life of the city.

Our Holy Week liturgy begins with Palm Sunday and a reminder that the key to all the liturgies we celebrate this week is participation. We are not an audience for the triumphal procession of Jesus into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, the events of Good Friday and the Easter Vigil; we are full participants. There is work to be done by us, the People of God, and if we do it well, it will plunge us into the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ.

Today Jesus enters Jerusalem on an ass. It is pure theater, and Jesus' choice of symbols both fulfills the Scriptures and mocks Rome, whose generals rode into conquered cities on white stallions leading armed soldiers. Their show of power was also liturgy, like presidents surrounding themselves with flags and generals when threatening war.

Jesus is instead a model of humility and nonviolence. The crowd gets the contrast and joins jubilantly into the fanfare with palm branches. The temple priests also get

the message and sit in council on how to stop these reckless provocations before the whole nation is brought down (cf Matt 26:3-5).

But Jesus is not through. If we read on in Matthew, we witness another brilliant show of public theater as Jesus sweeps through the temple courts turning over the tables of the money changers. This provocation also fulfills the Scriptures and digs deeply into the nerve of complicity between the high priests and Rome, which taxes the revenue for temple sacrifices. Together they have turned God's house into a "den of thieves."

Palm Sunday and the days of Holy Week are popular annual liturgies in our churches. But if we think of them only as religious services, we miss the profound invitation to participate. There is work here for God's People, called to be transformed into Christ in the world. We align our lives with the radical Jesus, who was executed for speaking truth to power. We align ourselves with all the martyrs for peace and justice, and with the plight of the poor and oppressed around the world and in our own nation that they advocated.

The pandemic this year will not allow us to gather (*ecclesia*) in our houses of worship, but let us do the liturgy well and play our part in the theater of God's Word, which is challenging our world to be transformed. By our participation in this sacred liturgy we grow in our love, and not just in spirit but as public service. This is how the week ahead will make us holy.

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