Spirituality
Scripture for Life



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by Sr. Carol J. Dempsey

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In the Christian tradition, Palm Sunday is both a joyful day and a sad day. All four Gospels describe the events of this day that commemorate Christ's entry into Jerusalem, depicting him riding into the city on a donkey as gathered crowds wave palm branches and shout "Hosanna" as he passes by. In biblical times and in ancient Near Eastern cultures, donkeys symbolized peace. Kings who were engaged in warfare rode horses, but leaders trying to usher in peace rode donkeys, symbolizing the leaders' goodwill. The waving of palms was a sign of celebration; the recitation of "Hosanna" was a hopeful plea for deliverance.

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

March 29, 2026

Matthew 21:1-11
Isaiah 50:4-7
Psalm 22
Philippians 2:6-11
Matthew 26:14-27:66

Marking the beginning of Holy Week, Palm Sunday anticipates the joyous solemnity of Easter. Yet the Palm Sunday readings are somber. They capture the experience of suffering, betrayal, crucifixion, death and the feeling of abandonment.

In the Isaian poem, a male prophetic character speaks a fortifying word to the weary and downtrodden, most likely suffering from oppression caused by unjust structures, attitudes and the inordinate use of power. Because of his address to the downtrodden, he suffers at the hands of his opposition. He is beaten, his beard plucked, and his face is spat upon. He endures injustices.

The Matthean account describes Christ's Passover meal; his gut-wrenching struggle in Gethsemane, knowing his death was imminent; his betrayal by his disciple Judas; his arrest by the Roman soldiers; his interrogation by the high priest and the Sanhedrin; the death sentence handed down to him by the religious leaders of his day; his deliverance into the hands of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate; the propaganda tactics that led the gathered crowds to choose life and freedom for Barabbas, a convicted felon, and death for Jesus accused of no crime; Peter's thrice

denial of ever having known him; and his actual crucifixion.

The sufferings of both the Isaian prophetic character and the Matthean Jesus are caused by human beings. Their suffering is not to be celebrated, emulated or spiritualized, as suggested by today's second reading from Philippians that depicts Christ as a slave and obedient to the point of death on a cross. The suffering endured by the Isaian prophetic character and the Matthean Jesus is just plain wrong. It stems from political, social and religious systemic, attitudinal and structural sin — whether conscious or unconscious — rooted in the abuse of power, control and dominance, fear and discrimination.

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The Divine One does not will the suffering of human beings at the hands of other humans. Otherwise, the Resurrection that counters the horrific and murderous Crucifixion would never have happened. The Author of life wills life, and unjust political, social and religious suffering is not a precursor to life lived in and with the Holy One.

Unfortunately, the suffering described in Isaiah and Matthew is the lived experience of many people today because, sadly, injustice pervades every corner of our world.

One example of unjust suffering is global environmental racism, a phrase coined in 1982. Environmental racism is an ongoing global problem as Western corporations spread their supply chains across national borders into countries and communities that have weak environmental protections. The Philippines has become a dumping ground for large corporations that illegally transport shipping containers full of waste into this Asian country. The country's inhabitants living near the dump sites are forced to endure toxic air, water and land pollution that results in all types of unnecessary illnesses.

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Another example is child labor, which affects at least 138 million children globally, especially in countries where poverty is rampant. These children, forced to work in hazardous conditions, suffer job-related illnesses, injuries and trauma because of poor working conditions. Child labor is one of the major justice issues affecting children today.

Lastly, in the United States, many legal citizens suffer profiling by law enforcement agents because of their race, nationality or ethnicity instead of actual evidence of a crime committed. Immigrants and members of the LGBTQ+ communities suffer legally and socially because of others' biases and prejudices. Oftentimes, they are subjected to negative stereotypes leading to discriminatory policies, practices and increased marginalization.

In sum, standing in solidarity with those who suffer is not enough. How long will we humans allow others to suffer injustice, to be struck and spat upon, to have their bodies broken and their blood poured out? Only when we deal with systemic and structural injustice deliberately, concretely and unabashedly will those suffering be able to stop singing today's responsorial psalm, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"