

Today, we enter into Holy Week.

This week is made holy by its celebration of Jesus' gift of himself to us and for us – which is so great, we break it down into parts for a fuller celebration – savoring each day and each liturgy.

Holy Thursday is a celebration of the gift of the Eucharist and a reflection on the example of service Jesus gives us. Join us at St. Jude at 5:00 pm or St. George at 7:00 pm, and imitate Jesus' service by washing the feet of others.

Good Friday is good because we truly remember how much Jesus loved us – even to the point of death on the cross. Join us at St. George at 5:00 pm or St. Jude at 7:00 pm --- beholding the wood of the cross, on which hung our salvation.

Saturday we are without a liturgy as we await the night-time celebration of Jesus' Resurrection, which is his and now ours. Join us at St. George at 8:00 pm as we welcome 3 new members into the Church – and through them, are reminded of who we are called to be.

And then the liturgies of Easter: St. George at 8:30 and St. Jude at 10:30 – when we once again get to sing out that word that has not even been spoken for the 40 days of Lent.

So my method for today, and Holy Thursday and Good Friday – is similar to what we have had in Lent, but slightly different.

Different in that I want to begin with a picture – and then move to a word. And the picture is not one I will provide, but one you will create – in your mind.

So let's move there. And perhaps it's best to close your eyes.

And imagine yourself on a crowded street leading into the holy city of Jerusalem.

A man you have come to know as Jesus comes along riding on a donkey – not a horse, which is highly symbolic. The donkey represents the humble arrival of someone in peace, as opposed to a triumphant victor of war -- who would arrive on a grand steed.

And Jesus is on his way into the city – Jerusalem – the place of death for all God's holy prophets.

You are caught up in the frenzy of the crowd. The shouts of hosanna surround you. And in your hand – in your hand --- you wave a palm branch – again highly symbolic – for it was customary to wave them as a sign of great respect – a way of lavishing praise – a symbol of peace as well as victory. . .

So --- a palm branch – the word, or symbol for today.

So open your eyes and come back to this time and this celebration. . .

Like the crowd in Jerusalem, we want to shout today: Hosanna – God, come and save us!

As we carry our palm branch home and wonder what to do with it – I suggest you put it in a prominent place in your home – perhaps behind a crucifix – as a subtle reminder for the week:

A reminder to pray – recognizing your desire for God to save you.

Use the palm as a reminder of your ambivalence – of how we are so easily persuaded by the crowds to deny our need for a Savior, our need for Christ to save us.

Use the palm branch to get you through Holy Week – let it represent your desire for Holy Thursday, teaching you a deeper gratitude for Jesus' self-giving love for us, so powerfully expressed in today's second reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians: though he was in the form of God, Jesus did not regard equality with God something to be grasped -something to be held onto for dear life --- rather he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.

A slave whose job it was to wash the feet of household guests – and so use the palm to represent your desire to be a servant to others, like Jesus – and with Jesus. . .

And let the palm be with you on Good Friday --- to remind you of the palms of Jesus hands – freely laid against the wood of the cross for us – and arms outstretched to welcome the sinner and the saint.

And let the palm be with you on Easter Sunday. Remembering that Christ's passion, and any participation you have in carrying your cross in his name – leads to his Resurrection – and to yours – the gift of eternal life – that is given to us.

Throughout the year, let that palm be a continual reminder of how much Jesus loves you and how deeply we all want to respond: Hosanna, God come and save us!

And let the palm, boldly remind you of the palm of God's hand -- that gently holds us and draws us close to God's heart.

And let the palm, remind you of the the palms of our own hands – which will soon hold the very body and blood of Christ -- and in turn those same palm that need to be held out in welcome, and in service, ready to embrace the poor, the weary, and the lost.

Hosanna: God, come and save us!