

Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday is a moveable feast in the church calendar observed by Catholic, Orthodox, and some Protestant Christians. It is the Sunday before Easter, and a celebration of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem in the days before his execution. In the Western church it must always fall on one of the 35 dates between March 15 and April 18.

In ancient times, the palm branch was a symbol of triumph and victory. (Leviticus 23:40 - Feast of Tabernacles, and Revelation 7:9) It was also a custom in all lands to cover, in some way, the path of someone thought worthy of the highest honour. Consequently, when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the crowd greeted him by waving palm fronds, and carpeting his path with them, thereby giving the day its name.

Originally the Roman Catholic Church officially called this Sunday the Second Sunday of the Passion; in 1970 the formal designation was changed to Passion Sunday, a change that has caused considerable confusion because the latter term had heretofore been affixed to the previous Sunday, or the fifth within Lent.

Concomitant with this revision, the entire week before Easter was redesignated Passion Week (formerly called "Holy Week" officially, and still usually referred to as such by the general public). In the Passion Week liturgy, on Palm Sunday palm fronds (or in colder climates some kind of substitutes) are blessed outside the church building and a procession enters, singing, re-enacting the entry into Jerusalem. These palms are saved in many churches to be burned later as the source of ashes used in Ash Wednesday services. The Roman Catholic Church considers the palms to be sacramentals.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, Palm Sunday is often called the Entry into Jerusalem, and is the beginning of Holy Week. The day before it is Lazarus Saturday, remembering the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead. On Lazarus Saturday believers often prepare palm fronds by knotting them into crosses in preparation for the procession on Sunday. In the Russian Orthodox Church, the custom developed of using pussy willows instead of palm fronds because palm fronds were not readily available. It is not determined what kind of branches should be used, so some Orthodox believers use olive branches.

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palm_Sunday

Palm Sunday: A Romanist Perspective

The sixth and last Sunday of Lent and beginning of Holy Week, a Sunday of the highest rank, not even a commemoration of any kind being permitted in the Mass. In common law it fixes the commencement of Easter duty.

The Roman Missal marks the station at St. John Lateran (see STATIONS) and before September, 1870, the pope performed the ceremonies there. The Greeks celebrate the day with

Palm Sunday: A Romanist Perspective

Page 2

Spanish *Pascua florida*, and it was from this day of 1512 that our State of Florida received its name (Nilles, II, 205).

From the custom of also blessing flowers and entwining them among the palms arose the terms *Dominica florida* and *dies floridus*. Flower-Sunday was well known in England, in Germany as *Blumensonntag* or *Blumentag*, as also among the Serbs, Croats, and Ruthenians, in the Glagolite Breviary and Missal, and among the Armenians.

The latter celebrate another Palm Sunday on the seventh Sunday after Easter to commemorate the "Ingressus Domini in coelum juxta visionem Gregorii Illuminatoris" called *Secundus floricultus* or *Secunda palmarum dominica* (Nilles, II, 519). Since this Sunday is the beginning of Holy Week, during which sinners were reconciled, it was called *Dominica indulgentioe, competentium, and capitilavium* from the practice of washing and shaving of the head as a bodily preparation for baptism.

During the early centuries of the Church this sacrament was conferred solemnly only in the night of Holy Saturday, the text of the creed had been made known to the catechumens on the preceding Palm Sunday. This practice was followed in Spain (Isidore, "De off. eccl.", I, 27), in Gaul (P. L., LXXII, 265), and in Milan (Ambrose, Ep. xx). In England the day was called Olive or Branch Sunday, Sallow or Willow, Yew or Blossom Sunday, or Sunday of the Willow Boughs.

Since the celebration recalled the solemn entry of Christ into Jerusalem people made use of many quaint and realistic representations; thus, a figure of Christ seated on an ass, carved out of wood was carried in the procession and even brought into the church. Such figures may still be seen in the museums of Basle, Zurich, Munich, and Nürnberg (Kellner, 50).

In some places in Germany and France it was customary to strew flowers and green boughs about the cross in the churchyard. After the Passion had been recited at Mass blessed palms were brought and this cross (in consequence sometimes called the Palm cross) was wreathed and decked with them to symbolize Christ's victory.

In Lower Bavaria boys went about the streets singing the "*Pueri Hebræorum*" and other carols, whence they received the name of *Pueribuben* ("Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift", 1892, 81).

Sometimes an uncovered crucifix, or the gospel-book, and often the Blessed Sacrament, was carried in recession. In many parts of England a large and beautiful tent was prepared in the churchyard. Two priests accompanied by lights brought the Blessed Sacrament in a beautiful cup or pyx hung in a shrine of open work to this tent. A long-drawn procession with palms and flowers came out of the church and made four stations at the Laics' cemetery north of the church, at the south side, at the west door, and before the church-yard cross, which was then uncovered. At each of these stations Gospels were sung. After the singing of the first Gospel the shrine with the Blessed Sacrament was borne forward. On meeting, all prostrated and kissed the ground. The

Palm Sunday: A Romanist Perspective

Page 3

mentions Amularius, "De div. off.", I, x, as the first to speak of them. Binterim, V, i, 173, on the authority of Severus, Patriarch of Antioch, and of Josue Stylites, states that Peter Bishop of Edessa, about 397 ordered the benediction of the palms for all the churches of Mesopotamia.

The ceremonies had their origin most probably in Jerusalem. In the "Peregrinatio Sylviae", undertaken between 378 and 394, they are thus described: On the Lord's Day which begins the Paschal, or Great, Week, after all the customary exercises from cock-crow till morn had taken place in the Anastasia and at the Cross, they went to the greater church behind the Cross on Golgotha, called the Martyrium, and here the ordinary Sunday services were held.

At the seventh hour (one o'clock p. m.) all proceeded to the Mount of Olives, Eleona, the cave in which Our Lord used to teach, and for two hours hymns, anthems, and lessons were recited. About the hour of None (three o'clock p. m.) all went, singing hymns, to the Imbomon, whence Our Lord ascended into heaven. Here two hours more were spent in devotional exercises, until about 5 o'clock, when the passage from the Gospel relating how the children carrying branches and Palms met the Lord, saying "Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord" is read. At these words all went back to the city, repeating "Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord." All the children bore branches of palm or olive. The faithful passed through the city to the Anastasia, and there recited Vespers. Then after a prayer in the church of the Holy Cross all returned to their homes.

In the three oldest Roman Sacramentaries no mention is found of either the benediction of the palms or the procession. The earliest notice is in the "Gregorianum" used in France in the ninth and tenth centuries. In it is found among the prayers of the day one that pronounces a blessing on the bearers of the palms but not on the palms. The name *Dominica in palmis, De passione Domini* occurs in the "Gelasianum", but only as a superscription and Probst ("Sacramentarien und Ordines", Münster, 1892, 202) is probably correct in suspecting the first part to be an addition, and the *De passione Domini* the original inscription. It seems certain that the bearing of palms during services was the earlier practice, then came the procession, and later the benediction of the palms.

The principal ceremonies of the day are the benediction of the palms, the procession, the Mass, and during it the singing of the Passion. The blessing of the palms follows a ritual similar to that of Mass. On the altar branches of palms are placed between the candlesticks instead of flowers ordinarily used. The palms to be blessed are on a table at the Epistle side or in cathedral churches between the throne and the altar. The bishop performs the ceremony from the throne, the priest at the Epistle side of the altar. An antiphon "Hosanna to the Son of David" is followed by a prayer. The Epistle is read from Exodus xv, 27-xvi, 7, narrating the murmuring of the children of Israel in the desert of Sin, and sighing for the fleshpots of Egypt, and gives the promise of the manna to be sent as food from heaven. The Gradual contains the prophetic words uttered by the high-priest Caiphas, "That it was expedient that one man should die for the people"; and another the prayer of Christ in the Garden of Olives that the chalice might pass; also his admonition to the disciples to watch and pray.

Palm Sunday: A Romanist Perspective

Page 4

right hand of God may expell all adversity, bless and protect all who dwell in them, who have been redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The prayers make reference to the dove bringing back the olive branch to Noah's ark and to the multitude greeting Our Lord; they say that the branches of palms signify victory over the prince of death and the olive the advent of spiritual unction through Christ. The officiating clergyman sprinkles the palms with holy water, incenses them, and, after another prayer, distributes them.

During the distribution the choir sings the "Pueri Hebræorum". The Hebrew children spread their garments in the way and cried out saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Then follows the procession, of the clergy and of the people, carrying the blessed palms, the choir in the mean time singing the antiphons "Cum appropinquet", "Cum audisset", and others.

All march out of the church. On the return of the procession two or four chanters enter the church, close the door and sing the hymn "Gloria, laus", which is repeated by those outside. At the end of the hymn the subdeacon knocks at the door with the staff of the cross, the door is opened, and all enter singing "Ingrediente Domino".

Mass is celebrated, the principal feature of which is the singing of the Passion according to St. Matthew, during which all hold the palms in their hands.

Palm branches have been used by all nations as an emblem of joy and victory over enemies; in Christianity as a sign of victory over the flesh and the world according to Ps. xci, 13, "Justus ut palma florebit "; hence especially associated with the memory of the martyrs. The palms blessed on Palm Sunday were used in the procession of the day, then taken home by the faithful and used as a sacramental. They were preserved in prominent places in the house, in the barns, and in the fields, and thrown into the fire during storms. O

In the Lower Rhine the custom exists of decorating the grave with blessed palms. From the blessed palms the ashes are procured for Ash Wednesday. In places where palms cannot be found, branches of olive, box elder, spruce or other trees are used and the "Cæremoniale episcoporum", II, xxi, 2 suggests that in such cases at least little flowers or crosses made of palm be attached to the olive boughs.

In Rome olive branches are distributed to the people, while the clergy carry palms frequently dried and twisted into various shapes. In parts of Bavaria large swamp willows, with their catkins, and ornamented with flowers and ribbons, were used.