

“Expectations”

This Sunday in the Church Year is one of great contrasts – as the joy of Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem gives way to the somber remembrance of His Passion. We go from the shouts of “Hosanna” (save us!), to the shouts of “crucify Him.”

The crowds of Palm Sunday give way to the crowds who ask Pilate to do what he traditionally had done for them during the time of the Passover Feast – that is, release one of the prisoners they asked for. And as if things were not already strange enough – the crowds ask for the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus.

Now, we realize that they want to get rid of Jesus – but Barabbas? Yes, Jesus was a thorn in their flesh – but He wasn’t a threat to their lives. Why would you want a murderer to be released into your midst?

God the Holy Spirit, working through St. Mark the Evangelist – reveals to us that Barabbas is not just a murderer, but an insurrectionist. In other words, just what the crowds were looking for!

A first-century-BC document sums up their expectations for “the Son of David,” the Messiah. “Undergird him with the strength to destroy unrighteous rulers, to purge Jerusalem from gentiles who trample her to destruction; in wisdom and in righteousness to drive out the sinners from the inheritance; to smash the arrogance of sinners like a potter’s jar, to shatter all their substance with an iron rod; to destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth.” (Psalms of Solomon 17)

Their expectations of deliverance from the occupation of the Romans when the Son of David came riding into town – dissipated when Jesus disrupts their Temple worship during this week – and now, stands silent before the Gentiles, submitting to them rather than purging them from Jerusalem.

For them, Jesus is such a disappointment. Maybe Barabbas can stir things up. Give us Barabbas – and crucify this Jesus!

You know what it's like when people don't live up to expectations – Coach Frost or Hoiberg, President Trump or Biden, the plumber, the doctor, the son or daughter. The problem here in our text – and with us – is not that Jesus doesn't live up to our expectations, it's that we are expecting the WRONG things!

Like the Jews who handed Jesus over to Pilate – we are tempted to think in earthly terms. We expect good for good people and punishment for those who do evil. We expect to be healed, to get ahead and to succeed. We want to see results – proof that Jesus is ruling and reigning in this world, and in our lives. We want earthly peace.

And along comes Jesus saying that His kingdom is not of this world. His ruling and reigning seem weak. It looks like one colossal defeat. He speaks of a peace that surpasses all human understanding – but in human terms, the Romans are still in charge and nothing has changed.

Cry all you want, and set your own expectations – but more than anything else, Jesus wants salvation for you – and everything else must serve that purpose. Jesus enters Jerusalem to do what is necessary to save you. He endures it all – the suffering – the mocking of His weakness, calling Him a loser, rejecting Him as the Son of God and the Savior of sinners.

He endures it all – from the crowds, the chief priests and scribes, Pilate, the soldiers, those crucified with Him – and from you.

Dearly beloved, let us repent for expecting Jesus to do our bidding, to follow our will, and mocking Him when we don't get our way. He who has baptized you puts to death this very day your Old Adam with all his sinful desires, and raises to life the new man – that's you – whose whole life is now oriented around the Christ who saves you, reigns for your benefit, and gives you peace.

Come, let us follow Him by faith, into His Passion – through His death and the grave – into the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.