

Sunday 9th April 2017 (Palm Sunday)

St Faith, Havant

8.00am – Mass & 9.30am – Parish Mass

Liturgy of the Palms: St Matthew 21.1-11

Liturgy of the Passion: Isaiah 50.4-9a; Philippians 2.5-11;

St Matthew 27.11-54

The crowd are a fickle bunch, as crowds sometimes are. In just a few days they go from hailing Jesus as one coming in the Lord's name, to demanding his public execution. Despite their changeability, however, the crowd are right all along. They just don't know it, because God does not do what they expect.

The crowd shouts "Hosanna to the son of David". It's not clear how "Hosanna" turned into a shout of praise; the Hebrew word means 'Save me', in the sense of 'rescue me from some dire fate' – that's how it's used all the way through the Old Testament. So the crowd are actually asking Jesus to save them: which he will do. But he won't offer them the overthrow of Roman rule by force, the salvation they expect. In the events that will follow he will instead offer eternal salvation from sin for any of them, and any of us, who grasp what will actually happen, and take it into their own heart and believe its significance.

The crowd shouts "Let him be crucified!". Persuaded by the chief priests and the elders, they want the trouble-maker done away with. They won't even have to trouble themselves

with any effort – crucifixion was a Roman execution, not a Jewish one, so the Romans will do all the work. The crowd asks for Jesus' expedient death: which they will get. But it is not the expected expediency of the disposal of a problematic person. Instead, crucifixion is what God has chosen for himself as *the* expedient, the way in which he will bring his own salvation for all people. As we heard from John's gospel a few weeks ago, "so *must* the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life". Against all expectations of the crowd, "Let him be crucified" is exactly what "Hosanna" – 'Save me' – looks like.

The crowd shouts "His blood be on us and on our children!". In the face of Pilate's reticence, the crowd take responsibility for what is about to happen on themselves. This one sentence of scripture is at the root of a thread of anti-Semitism which has shamefully and wrongly wormed its way through Christian history ever since. But the crowd *are* inviting God's potential punishment upon themselves: that is what they expect. What happens instead is that Christ's blood is poured out on the cross "for the forgiveness of sins". And it is still poured out to this very day at the altar, for us and our children and our children's children for as long as there are faithful Christians. And it is poured out into eternity in heaven, where a great multitude which no-one can number are clothed all in white for they have

washed themselves in the blood of the Lamb. Against all possible expectations, "His blood be on us and on our children!" is not how we are condemned to participate in God's punishment but how we are invited to participate in our salvation. This is exactly how "Hosanna" – 'Save me' – includes the crowd in Jesus' story of salvation. This is how it includes me, and you.

And what of that great multitude in heaven? Well the book of Revelation tells us that they are shouting "Salvation belongs to our God...and to the Lamb!". Which is not all that different from shouting 'Hosanna to the Son of David'. And they are carrying? Palm branches. The crowd in Jerusalem did not know, but the innumerable host of heaven does. And today we too are invited to lay aside what we expect of God, and to know that what we are called to remember and share in this week is the wonderfully unexpected, generously endless work of God. It is God's eternal response to the crowd, to us, and to everybody who chooses to hear and see it; his response when we shout 'Save me' – "Hosanna".