

April 9, 2017

**“Thank You, Jesus”
Matthew 21:1-11**

Saturday, March 25 was a glorious day, a beautiful spring day. So after taking a walk to the church, I decided to join those watching the St. Patrick’s Day parade in town. I sat along Station Road on a portable chair. The parade started with VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) members carrying a banner, leading those who followed. We saw the Amityville Highland Pipes and Drums march. The Bellport Fire Department with vehicles of all ages came along.

Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, Little League, Youth Soccer League - they all paraded. Local business people and Bellport Sailing cruised their floats in the parade.

This parade, sponsored by the Bellport Fire Department, featured various local fire departments - Brookhaven, Hagerman, Center Moriches and more.

There was excitement in the air. People were dressed in green, waved at those who passed by in the parade. Dressing up for the festivities was half the fun of the parade for some.

The fun parts I had were recognizing some of those in the parade, calling out their names and waving at them. Saying “Thank you” to those volunteer fire fighters, who paraded, and their recognizing our “Thank you” shouts was a great part of being at the parade. We need both to make a parade a success: those who parade and those who watch the parade with active participation.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey over 2,000 years ago, it was something like a parade. Jesus got on a donkey or a colt, as the Gospel of Matthew writes both, and proceeded from a village called Bethphage, which is located about half a mile to Jerusalem. His disciples had laid their clothes on the animal he rode. The crowd, probably the people who had followed Jesus to Bethpage and the villagers, spread their clothes and palm branches on the road. People were in front of and behind Jesus, and shouted, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna, in the highest!”

When they paraded in Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up. “Who is this?” they said. The crowds answered, “It’s the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

It was a happy and joyous occasion for the followers of Jesus and the crowds to enter Jerusalem with Jesus humbly but triumphantly. We sang “Hosanna, Loud Hosanna” as our joyous hymn of praise a short time ago.

Later this week, however, we will enter the shadow of the Holy Week. We will hear about betrayal, denial, rejection, injustice, torture, mockery and death. As Jesus parades through the shadow, let us accompany him. I invite you all to come to the Holy Thursday and Good Friday

services, both of which will be held at our church. When we experience shadows, the shadows within and outside us, we can appreciate more the light Easter brings to us.

After fasting, I come to appreciate food more. After a power shortage due to a storm, we come to appreciate electricity, readily available, more. After a tragedy, we come to appreciate more the love of the community that surrounds us.

Why did Jesus have to die on the cross? That question will surface this week. Why did the crowd shout “Crucify Him” instead of Barabbas, a popular revolutionary leader, who tried to change the world through military power? Why was the crowd silent when others shouted “Crucify Him”?

Would we choose Jesus over Barabbas if we had been there? Would we choose the one who is going to lead by force; throw out the Romans; reclaim our tax money, wealth, and prosperity; and restore the strength of our nation? Or would we choose the other whose leadership involves loving these same oppressors, serving them as they dwell among us, doubling the service they demand of us? Which one would we wish to see freed? Whom do we wish to see destroyed? Which one would we feel safer with or even prefer?

Those are hard questions, (pause) aren't they? As we struggle with those questions and put ourselves in the shoes of those who witnessed to or took part in the crucifixion of Jesus, we may face the shadow side of humanity, for whom Jesus died, and encounter the supreme love Jesus showed to us.

As we walk through Holy Week, knowing that the dawn of Easter is waiting for us, may we keep those three words close to our hearts. “Thank you, Jesus.” Amen.