



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for Palm Sunday (29th March) 2026

The people who greeted Jesus on that first Palm Sunday, went out to meet the man Whom they believed would be the leader of an insurrection, which would overthrow either the tyranny of the Roman Empire or the corruption of the dominant Jerusalem priesthood: it is not quite clear which, but probably could not have been both. The palms that they carried, were part of the panoply of rejoicing at what they hoped was their imminent liberation from the yoke of either worldly or religious oppression: it was an earthly hope imposed on Jesus of Nazareth and one which would die with Him at Calvary.

In a stylised way, at the beginning of Mass today, we re-create that scene; and, although it is tempting for us to suppose that we, being more enlightened, greet the Christ as He turned out to be, in fact, we should be hesitant about distancing ourselves too far from the crowd of all those years ago. We might know the theory of Christ's saving Death and Resurrection, but still we are more than capable of imposing on Him the earthly hopes of our own day and lives, of the which our palms might be seen as tokens.

As you probably know, some of the palms from this morning will be burnt on or around Ash Wednesday next year. Insofar as we identify them with the events of two thousand years ago, this represents a deferred funeral for the hope, which, as I say, died at Golgotha. If we were re-designing the Liturgical scheme, we might burn the palms in the evening of Good Friday and keep the ash; but people like to have the palms for a while.

Wrapped up in all of this is a truth of Holy Week - or, perhaps, more accurately an element of the Truth, which is our Lord: namely, that hope, which is rooted in the things of this world, must die to make room for the authentic hope proclaimed in and by Christ, just as the political hope placed in Him on that first Palm Sunday had to die on Good Friday to make space for us to see and experience the reality of the hope, which His Life embodies and inaugurates.

If we look for signs of hope for our lives in riches or status or celebrity, we shall not find the path of hope, which leads to sanctification and union with God. This is not to say that wealthy, important or famous cannot find that path; but if they suppose that such things are, of themselves, marks of divine blessing, they are looking in the wrong place.

However, of course, it is easy to condemn the mighty and those who seem to us proud in the imagination of their hearts; but, in fact, earthly rooted hope comes in all sorts of guises and I doubt that is or has ever been a solely human life, which does not look for that true hope in places where it is not to be found. Most, if not all of us, have hopes, which must be set aside - allowed to die - if we are fully to embrace the one true Hope.

Even in the field of our religious practice, the tares of worldly hope are sown amidst the stems growing from the true hope in Christ: we can seek to find from our religion the wrong sorts of comfort and aspiration.

Yet, for all of this, as we shall celebrate next week, the true Hope can never be extinguished, because it is God's Will and Purpose that we should see it through the clouds and mists of earthly events. The task of our Christian discipleship is to seek that Hope and make it our own: not just in word, but in deed, fashioning our choices and actions around it.