



The Holy See

PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 4 April 2004

19th World Youth Day

"We wish to see Jesus" (Jn 12: 21)

1. *"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord" (Lk 19: 38).*

With these words, the population of Jerusalem welcomed Jesus at his entry into the holy city, acclaiming him as King of Israel. Yet a few days later, the same crowd was to reject him with hostile cries: *"Crucify him! Crucify him!"* (Lk 23: 21). The Palm Sunday liturgy helps us relive these two moments of the last week in Jesus' earthly life. It plunges us into that fickle crowd which in a few days veered from joyful enthusiasm to murderous contempt.

2. In the climate of joy veiled in sadness that is a feature of Palm Sunday, we are celebrating the *19th World Youth Day*. Its theme this year is *"We wish to see Jesus"* (Jn 12: 21), the request made to the Apostles by "some Greeks" (Jn 12: 20) who had come to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover.

Before the multitudes who had gathered to listen to him, Christ proclaimed: *"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself"* (Jn 12: 32). Here, then, is his answer: all who seek the Son of man will see him in the Feast of Easter as a true Lamb, sacrificed for the world's salvation.

On the Cross, Jesus died for each one of us. *The Cross, therefore, is the greatest and most eloquent sign of his merciful love*, the one sign of salvation for every generation and for all humanity.

3. *Twenty years ago at the end of the Holy Year of the Redemption, I presented the large wooden Cross of that Jubilee to the young people. On that occasion I urged them to be faithful disciples of Christ, the crucified King, whom we see "as the one who brings man freedom based on truth, frees man from what curtails, diminishes and as it were breaks off this freedom at its root, in man's soul, his heart and his conscience" (Redemptor Hominis, n. 12).*

From that time the Cross continues travelling to many countries in preparation for the World Days of Youth. During its pilgrimages it has crossed continents: as a torch passed hand to hand, it was transported from country to country; it has become a luminous sign of the trust that animates the young generations of the third millennium. Today it is in Berlin!

4. Dear young people! As you celebrate the 20th anniversary of the beginning of this extraordinary spiritual adventure, may I renew for you the same recommendation I gave you back then: "I entrust the Cross of Christ to you! Take it through the world as a sign of Our Lord Jesus' love for humanity, and proclaim to one and all that only in the dead and risen Christ is there salvation and redemption" (*Insegnamenti*, VII, [1984], 1105).

Of course, the message that the Cross communicates is not easy to understand in our day and age in which material well-being and conveniences are offered and sought as priority values. But you, dear young people, do not be afraid to proclaim the Gospel of the Cross in every circumstance. Do not be afraid to swim against the tide!

5. "*Christ Jesus... humbled himself and became obedient unto death... on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him...*" (Phil 2: 6, 8-9). The wonderful hymn in the Letter of St Paul to the Philippians has just reminded us that the Cross has two inseparable dimensions: it is at the same time both *sorrowful and glorious*. The suffering and humiliation of Jesus' death are closely connected with the exaltation and glory of his Resurrection.

Dear brothers and sisters! Dear young people! May you always be conscious of this consoling truth! The passion and Resurrection of Christ constitute the core of our faith and our support in the inevitable daily trials.

May Mary, the Sorrowful Virgin and silent witness of the joy of the Resurrection, help you to follow the crucified Christ and to discover in the mystery of the Cross the full meaning of life.

Praised be Jesus Christ!

