

“When the Wood is Green”

(Luke 23:31)

Rev. Dr. Alfonso O. Espinosa

Introduction: So which is it? What vitally important day in the life of God’s Church and God’s people is it today? Is it the Sunday of the Passion or is it Palm Sunday?

Answer: Yes! He was entering into Jerusalem to receive Palm Sunday praises and He was entering into Jerusalem to commence His most severe suffering and passion which would lead to His gory and excruciating crucifixion to cover your sin with His blood.

- A. Jesus entered into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday. It was a jubilant, celebrational, and victorious event. The palms were signs of welcoming royalty and the shouts of “Hosanna” which mean “Save now!” represented the confidence the people were placing in Jesus as a King and Savior.
- B. The question, however, comes in the form of understanding what *kind* of king and what *kind* of Savior. How many of those very same people understood *why* Jesus was coming into Jerusalem or understood *for what purpose* was Jesus coming into Jerusalem; why was He coming and what was He going to do? How many of the people in that original Palm

Sunday crowd would change their minds just a few days later -- while not all of them did -- when the popular crowd would shout and request that Christ be crucified instead?

- C. For now, let me just say that while there was *popular* confusion about the Lord and His ministry, what is most clear is that Jesus Himself knew ***exactly why He was entering into Jerusalem. He had no illusions about it as is made plain in the Scriptures leading up to Palm Sunday. Here are just two:***

Matthew 16:21: “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

Matthew 17:22-23: “As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, ²³and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.’ And they were greatly distressed.”

Part I: But Did Jesus’ Prior Knowledge Make His Passion Less Severe?

- A. Not in the least. Just compare what happened to our Savior to you or I having prior knowledge that we are going to undergo a surgery. Your prior knowledge does

not make the surgery less painful. In fact, if anything the prior knowledge might present *more* hardship through worry, fear, and anxiety of what lies ahead!

- B. The nails that would tear into His flesh were still 5-7 inches long. The whips designed with embedded bone fragments and metal balls still tore at His flesh. In fact and again -- if anything -- Jesus had a *better* understanding of what was awaiting Him more so than anyone else who might suffer crucifixion.
- C. Still, this was an amazing situation to say the least: while His bodily suffering would go beyond anything we could ever imagine or experience, He still had a grasp on what God was going to do.
- D. His suffering to this day is indescribable. Not only did He endure the rigors of the physical torture by the Romans, but He was the only innocent one who ever lived; the man least deserving of any punishment, to say nothing of being least deserving of any humiliation. But that's not all we should consider. Jesus was carrying the load of my sin, *and* your sin, *and* the sin of the entire world. We should all know that to carry our own load is hard. In fact sometimes, our own load, just our load can seem simply overwhelming...I have seen people in utter despair over their *own* sin; overwhelmed by their *own* shame and guilt, and *yet*, *Jesus bore mine, and yours, and yours, and yours, and yours, and yours, and the sin of all on Himself.*

- E. So that the actual suffering was the worse suffering anyone has ever faced, and I say this in the face of terrible suffering that we are aware of. I will never forget being assigned to a cancer ward at Lutheran Hospital in Indiana and with certain types of cancer, some people have the constant sensation of burning...they are in agony. Jesus' suffering was surpassingly worse.
- F. And yet, He knew what God was going to do.

Part II: And So In The Midst of His Passion, Right in the Middle of It, On the Way to the Cross Jesus Filled with Full Knowledge of What was Actually Happening, Cared More for Us than Himself:

- A. He sees and hears the mourners...probably both the professional ones and the real and sincere ones and then speaks to them right in the middle of His passion. He gives warnings to them out of love. What a testimony of His love for you. Imagine dear Christian, even as your Savior was in the middle of this terrible passion, this true King, this true Savior was thinking of you, praying for you, serving you, you, you.
- B. I got a little glimpse of this kind of selflessness when I served Mike Leubner, a disciple of Jesus Christ, my former parishioner whom I served right up to his funeral service. I was there when the doctor came into

his hospital room and told Mike that he had terminal cancer. Mike didn't miss a beat. It was stunning! The news was grave and depressing; it was frightening, but his *instantaneous* reaction was to look up at me and to begin to make plans on how he wanted me to work with him and his wife to reach out to his three daughters so that they would remain in or come back to the faith. Mike's *preoccupation* was for those he loved...what would be best for them. It was absolutely mind blowing. And I realized I was watching the work of the Holy Spirit who had formed Mike to be like Jesus. And Mike's words continue to ring in my ear. While he was healthy and while he was sick he would always say, "It's all good!" (and if you do it right, you need to insert a Texas drawl). He was right.

- C. Jesus knew how serious and excruciating this passion, this suffering was, but He knew at the same time that "it was all good."
- D. So the Scriptures say:

Hebrews 12:2: "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

- E. The passion, the suffering, the pain was real, but Jesus knew what God was doing.

- 1) Remember this Christian, because it is true for you too...God knows your passion, your suffering, and He knows that your pain is real, but God knows what He is doing! Trust Him...just look at Jesus!
- 2) Remember this Christian, it's all good! God is working good; God will work good...just look at Jesus!

Part III and Conclusion: So Jesus Spoke These words in Love on the Road and on the Way to be Crucified:

Luke 23:31: "For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

- A. It is possible that Jesus had in mind how the Romans were treating Him, or how the Jews were treating Him, or how God the Father was permitting all of this; and it's perfectly possible that our Lord had all three in mind.

B. As in this:

- 1) If the *Romans* treat Me, whom they admit to be innocent, in this manner, how will they treat those who are rebellious and guilty? And/or...

- 2) If the *Jews* deal thus with One who has come to save them, what treatment shall they receive themselves for destroying Him? And/or...
- 3) If *God* permits this to happen to one who is innocent, what will be the fate of the guilty?

(Just, *Concordia Commentary:*
Luke 9:51-24:53, CPH, 920)

- C. But the most important thing in this context dear Christian is the way in which Jesus refers to Himself: He is the ***green wood***.
- D. It is not that such wood is incapable of being burned. Jesus after-all endured the true fire of the crucifixion for the sins of the world, but this wood even if it is burned is ***green. It has water; it is damp and it is sappy...it contains life!***
- E. Think of a forest fire. A fire can rip through a forest and afterwards, one observes utter devastation, and yet it is simply incredible to realize that life finds a way to come back: sprouts occur even in the midst of destruction.
- F. Traci is into flowers and plants...and how I love to watch her work. But it is amazing to me that sometimes certain vines look devastated...and then

much to our surprise (sometimes, not always), there is a sprout...life comes back.

- G. Jesus was also telling His people and through the enduring Word of the Lord, He is telling you and me today: Consider the ***green wood***.
 - H. By yourself, in your sin, your wood is not green. In sin, we are dead. In sin, your wood is dry. There is no life in you and in time sinners by themselves without God can only break down...entropy is too powerful...and we become helpless to help ourselves, to help our spouses, to help our families.
 - I. But...Jesus was lovingly reaching out to the mourners even in the midst of His passion and inviting them to hold on to the ***green wood!***
- 1) "Even as I am about to be crucified," Jesus was saying, "hold on to me, and be united to the green wood."
 - 2) "When you do, even through death -- through death itself -- you will be amazed at my power to keep you united to life!"
 - 3) Tertullian wrote that in repentance -- as you turn from sin and turn to God -- you will be ***"draw[n] forth when sunk in the waves of sin, and [repentance] will bear you forward into the port of the divine clemency.***

Seize the opportunity of unexpected felicity: that you, who sometime were in God's sight nothing but 'a drop of a bucket,'...may thenceforward become that 'tree which is sown beside the waters, is perennial in leaves, bears fruit at it's own time.'

(Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 3,
Tertullian, *On Repentance*, 659)

J. That is, in Christ, the ***green wood***, even in the face of the fires and struggles, you will be united to the source of all life, forgiveness of sins, and blessings! And these words will describe you as one incorporated into the ***green wood who bore your sins and rose victorious from the grave:***

Psalm 1:3: ***"[I am now] like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither."***

Jeremiah 17:8: ***"[I am as a Christian] like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."***

K. This is a description of you dear Christian attached to and united with Jesus, your ***green wood***.

- L. As the book of Job records, ***"For there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease."*** (Job 14:7)
- M. Jesus was cut down...but nevertheless life was still in Him...***and His life has been given to you even as you will receive it again today in the Holy Sacrament***...and if you be cut down, since you have received this life...your shoots; your life will not cease. This is why we shout "Hosanna"...He entered to establish His reign as the King and Savior whose Passion saved us from sin and death...so we shout "Hosanna" because we know precisely why He came that first Palm Sunday: to conduct His Passion which has filled you dear Christian with the life of God!