

Chapter 1

Palm Sunday (Leader's Guide)

Luke 19:28-40

What's going on?

The Palm Sunday passage is the culmination of what is known as Jesus' "travel narrative" which begins all the way back in Luke 9:51 when Jesus "sets His face toward Jerusalem." From here until His entry into the Holy City, Jesus goes about His journey preaching about the coming of His Father's Kingdom through parables and instruction. Throughout the entire journey however, His disciples who are with Him never seem to quite understand why they're headed to Jerusalem or what's going to happen when they get there. It's easy for us to look at the apostles in light of all of Jesus' Gospel references to His passion and think, "Come on guys, you've been traveling with Jesus all this time and you still don't have a clue do you?" But do *we* really understand why the passion had to take place the way it did?

Entering into Christ's Passion:

- 1 **Read Luke 9:51-56.** Here, Jesus “sets His face” to travel to Jerusalem. Before He goes however, He sends messengers before Him to prepare His way in every town He will visit along the way. Why do you think He does this?

This is an interesting question. Try to really get their opinions on it. One thought is that a king would always send messengers before him to prepare his way. This is one of many ways Jesus is showing His Kingship. It is also an insight into the ways God actively calls us to action in the coming about of His Kingdom. This theme will play out through the next couple of questions.

- 2 **Read Luke 9:52-56.** In what ways does Jesus call us to be His messengers?

How can the witness of our faith plant a seed in the soul of someone else? There are so many ways that we can be examples in the lives of others. As Christians, whether we realize it or not, people are watching us. Many people around us every day who have never heard the good news of the Gospel are dying to hear it. Jesus calls us to bring His Good News to the world.

- 3 Do you think that Christ sends messengers before us to prepare our way? Have you ever felt like someone was looking out for you or preparing your way?

As Christians, we believe that in Baptism, Christ, through the working of the Holy Spirit takes up real residence in our hearts. Moreover, when we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, we carry with us the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus. In a sense, we become like Christ for the rest of the world. **Try and convey the power of this.** Surely, if we are called to be Christ to the world, messengers would be sent to prepare His way within us!

What does that mean? At this moment, there are countless angels at work in the world. In fact, each of us have at least one angel with us at all times. A messenger can come in many different types. Try to share a story of yourself or someone else who has experienced the intervention of a guardian angel.

- 4 **Read Luke 17:24-25 and 18:31-33.** What is Jesus trying to tell His disciples in these verses? Do they understand Him?

Jesus is warning the disciples in these verses that He must go to Jerusalem to “suffer and die.” He is telling them that He must do this in order to fulfill the scriptures and the prophets. In Luke 18:34, we’re told that Jesus’ disciples don’t understand Him. **Compare with Luke 9:23.** If we are to sincerely follow Christ and be His disciples, we too must take up our crosses and follow after Him.

- 5 **Luke 19:33-39.** Jesus seems to enter Jerusalem in a somewhat unusual way, yet all of the bystanders seem to know exactly what’s going on. Why do you think this is?

Why Jerusalem? This is an important point. Jerusalem wasn’t an arbitrary location for Jesus to fulfill His mission; in fact, it really couldn’t have been done any other way.

Throughout the history of Israel, kings always ruled from the city of Jerusalem. It was the home of the temple, the city of the prophets and the crossroads of all Hebrew commerce. Picture Wall Street, Washington DC, and Vatican City all rolled into one and you get an idea of the importance of the ancient city. Jesus wasn’t merely going for the dramatic symbolism though. Israel had been without the aforementioned king for generations. Jesus was the King of kings coming home to claim His throne.

Entering into Christ's Passion:

6 How does Jesus still come to us today?

This passage is rich with symbolism. Split up 1 Kings 1:38-40, Zechariah 9:9, 2 Kings 9:13, and Psalm 118:26. These are the Old Testament prophecies and events that foreshadow Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Any educated Jew in the time of Christ would have remembered King Solomon riding a donkey to his coronation in 1 Kings. Likewise, they would have recognized the prophet Zechariah proclaiming that the Messiah would do the very same thing. The whole Jewish people had been waiting on the edge of their seats for generations in expectation of the Messiah. So when they saw these prophesied signs they not only lay their garments on the road mirroring the action of the crowd at Jehu's coronation in 2 Kings, but they also cry out a blessing from the temple procession found in Psalm 118. Surely they thoughtfully understood Jesus to be the long awaited biblical Messiah.

7 What is *our* response to Him?

Read Luke 19:38. Ask if the crowd's exclamation sounds familiar. In fact, it is the *Benedictus*; part of the *Sanctus*; one of the Eucharistic prayers the Church uses in the Mass.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger ties the Palm Sunday exultation and our prayer in the mass together in a powerful way. Both are greetings to Jesus as He comes to us - on Palm Sunday, riding a donkey - and at Mass, under the appearances of bread and wine.

A Journey through Holy Week

“When the youths of Jerusalem shout this verse to Jesus, they are greeting Him as the Messiah, as the king of the last days who enters the Holy City and the temple to take possession of them...the Benedictus is meaningful both as an approach to the consecration and as an acclimation to the Lord who has become present in the Eucharistic species. The great moment of His coming, the immensity of His real Presence in the elements of the earth, definitely call for a response.”

☞ **Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*.**

You will want to share this in light of **Questions 7 & 8**. Jesus comes to us in many ways, but especially through the sacraments and, in particular, the Eucharist. Do we acknowledge Christ in the Eucharist as surely as if He were standing before us physically? If not, what causes us to struggle? Get the students to really see that Jesus is just as present in the Mass as He was on Palm Sunday - more, in fact.