



## **Homily – Palm Sunday 2016**

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth  
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Sixteen years ago, at the beginning of the new millennium, Pope St John Paul II wrote a very beautiful letter in which he tried to set before the Church the path it should follow in the years ahead. Six years later, Pope Benedict took his place as St Peter's successor and then, just three years ago, Pope Francis assumed the role of the leadership of our Church. While each of these men is very different, the central message of each one is the same. They all point us to Christ as the one who stands at the heart of our faith. For Pope John Paul II, this was summed up in the idea that, before we could hope to offer the Good News of Jesus to the world around us, we had, first of all, to contemplate the face of Jesus ourselves – in other words, we had to come to know Him better and love Him more. For Pope Benedict, it was important to understand that being a Christian is fundamentally the result of an encounter with a person, Jesus, who gives a whole new direction to our lives. We have to go looking for Him or, perhaps it is better to say, allow Him to find us. And, for Pope Francis, our eyes should be firmly fixed on Jesus because He is the face of the Father's mercy, the one who can reveal to us the true nature of God.

These three great leaders of our Church are in total harmony in this: we will only begin to understand the mystery of God, and the mystery of ourselves, and the mystery of the world in which we find ourselves, if we turn our eyes to Christ and allow Him to be the heart and soul of our faith. He proclaimed Himself to be the Way and the Truth and the Life. He is inviting us to allow Him to be exactly that in our own lives today.

Every page of the Gospels reveals something of the mystery of Jesus to us, but it is perhaps in the story of His passion and death that we encounter him most fully. Today, then, as we celebrate Palm Sunday and begin Holy Week, that final week in which we remember the last days of Jesus' life and look forward to the joy of Easter, we are invited to look carefully, to gaze intently, on the face of Jesus.

We watch as He enters into Jerusalem, receiving the enthusiastic welcome of the crowds but knowing, at the same time, that they will turn against Him and that His entry into Jerusalem is, in fact, His entry into death.



We watch as Jesus sits at the table and shares a last meal with His disciples, giving them the bread and wine which are His body and blood broken and spilt for them and for us. He knows that He will soon be taken away from His disciples but, in the gift of the Eucharist, He assures them, and us, that He will always be with us, often in ways we cannot easily recognise or understand.

We watch as Jesus travels that terrible journey from the room of the Last Supper, to the Garden of Gethsemane, and eventually to the hill of Calvary where what happened at the table in symbol will happen in reality: His body will be broken on the cross and His blood will be poured out in death.

And, finally, we will watch as His lifeless body is taken down from the cross and laid in the tomb.

What do we see as we watch Jesus in these last days? We see a man who is determined to give everything, who is prepared to hold nothing back, who is ready to suffer humiliation, and hatred, and ridicule and, finally, who is prepared to die, because of love. There are many explanations for Jesus' death – the jealousy and fear of some of the Jewish leaders, the betrayal of Judas, the cruelty and blood-lust of some in the Roman army, the cowardice of Pontius Pilate – but, in the end, there is only one explanation. Jesus gave His life for us because He loved His Father and because He loved us so much that He would not stop proclaiming the truth about who God really is, even though He knew it would cost Him His life.

As we look on the face of Jesus in Holy Week and see there nothing but love, we know that we are seeing directly into the mind and heart of God Himself. No failure, no mistake, no weakness or betrayal on our part can destroy God's love for us. In giving us Jesus, who offers His life for us, God gives everything to us and for us.

This Holy Week is precisely that – holy – because it is the week when, more than at any other time of the year, God reveals to us the depths, the greatness of His love, His compassion, and His boundless mercy. In Jesus, we come to see a God who is worth believing in, a God who can be trusted with everything, a God who walks with us, in our joys and in our sorrows, and who always holds out to us the gift of life in its fullness. We have only to reach out and accept this precious gift. And, if we do, it really will be a Holy Week for us, and through us for all those we love and all those we encounter along the way of our own journey of life.