

## Homily for Palm Sunday

In the old liturgy, before Vatican II, the reading of the Passion was greeted with total silence. There was no homily. Even the concluding acclamation: “This is the gospel of the Lord” was omitted. On a day like this, I sometimes feel that the most eloquent response to the word of God we have proclaimed is silence. Even the best of homilies could be a distraction from the deep meditation in which many of us find ourselves at the end of the story of the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. But then also, a homily might be useful to direct and focus our meditation in the right direction.

What different story would we be telling today if the unnamed owners of the donkey had refused to give it up? Maybe we would have no story of the triumphal entry, at least not in the way Jesus wanted it. No matter how unknown a person is, he or she can still play a crucial role in the unfolding of God’s plan. The Lord needs each one of us as he needed the unnamed owners of the donkey in the reading. We are not told who these owners of the donkey are but the fact that they understood that “the Lord” refers to Jesus and voluntarily gave up the donkey shows that they could be his secret disciples or admirers. Otherwise one would have expected them to answer, “But who is this Lord who needs my donkey?”

A donkey was a very big thing in those day. The donkey was the equivalent of a car, a truck and a tractor all in one. It was a car because people used it to move around and do their shopping, a truck because it was used to carry load, and a tractor because it was used in cultivating the land. Add to this the fact that the donkey had never been ridden, that means it was brand new and had a very high market value. You can see that giving up the donkey just because the Lord needed it was a very big sacrifice. It was a generous and heroic act of faith.

All of us have a donkey. You and I each have something in our lives, which, if given back to God, could, like the donkey, move Jesus and his story further down the road. Maybe you can sing, play music, pray, render your time, talent, treasure or hug or program a computer or speak Spanish or write a check. Whichever, that’s your donkey. Whichever, your donkey belongs to him. It really does belong to him. Your gifts are his and the donkey was his. The original wording of the instructions Jesus gave to his disciples is proof: “If anyone asks you why you are taking the

donkeys, you are to say, 'Its Lord is in need.'" So, what is the name of your donkey? The Lord has need of it.

An interesting as well as challenging old fable tells of the colt that carried Jesus on Palm Sunday. The colt thought that the reception was organized to honor him. "I am a unique donkey!" this excited animal might have thought. When he asked his mother if he could walk down the same street alone the next day and be honored again, his mother said, "*No, you are nothing without Him who was riding you.*" Five days later, the colt saw a huge crowd of people in the street. It was Good Friday, and the soldiers were taking Jesus to Calvary. The colt could not resist the temptation of another royal reception. Ignoring the warning of his mother, he ran to the street, but he had to flee for his life as soldiers chased him and people stoned him. Thus, the colt finally learned the lesson that he was only a poor donkey without Jesus to ride on him. As we enter Holy Week, today's readings challenge us to examine our lives to see whether we carry Jesus within us and bear witness to Him through our living or whether we are Christians in name only.