

Blessed are you Lord Jesus, King of Eternal Glory. Amen.

‘Let us go together to meet Christ on the Mount of Olives. Let us spread before his feet not garments or lifeless olive branches which delight the eye for a few hours and then wither, but ourselves, clothed in his grace. We who have been baptised into Christ must ourselves be the garments that we spread before him. Let our souls take the place of the welcoming branches as we join today in the children’s holy song:

‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the king of Israel’.

These are the words of St Andrew of Crete who lived between 660 and 740AD

Today we celebrate the Lord’s coming into Jerusalem. The day when the crowds welcomed him with loud singing and celebration. Christ knows he comes to confront his destiny. His time has come. He comes to provoke. To provoke those who would kill him. To provoke those who claim to support him. To provoke the human race into making a choice. A choice between goodness and evil. In the end, the crowds turn on him and even his supporters run away.

Today we process through the gates with him and we rejoice, but even before the day is out we begin to feel a change in atmosphere. As this week progresses, the air becomes increasingly tense as we begin to see the climax for everything that has gone before.

Why does Christ choose to provoke his accusers into making a choice? Why does he not just stay away? Love! Pure, undiluted love. Such goodness always brings a reaction from those who do not wish their comfortable worlds to be challenged. But that is what Christ does. He challenges us to live more according to his goodness. He challenges us to prioritise good over evil, God over personal gain. To give, in order that others may gain, even if, like him, it means giving everything we have.

Catherine of Sienna, that holy saint of the 14th Century, puts it this way: 'Nails were not enough to hold God and man nailed and fastened to the cross, had not love held him there'.

There were so many opportunities for Christ to avoid the dreadful fate that was before him, he could have stopped Judas from betraying him, he could have ran in the garden, he could have offered testimony when questioned by pilot, but first, on the day we celebrate today, he could have even avoided entering the city at all. He could have retreated and retained his comfort. But any of these would have been to let evil win the day and deny the goodness that underpinned his soul.

The same is true for us. The choices Christ makes on his journey are similar to the choices we are called to make throughout our lives. Choices between goodness and evil. Choices between comfort and challenge. Choices between God or worldly success.

This week we will see how the victory of God comes not according to worldly success, but through all seeming failure - the failure of being killed on the cross. Holy Week begins today and as we journey through the week together, we will walk the same path the disciples walked when Christ's blessed feet were on this earth. Just like the disciples, some of us may find the world getting in the way and either not be able to make or bear the entire journey. But nonetheless, along with those who remain, we will gain an insight into the cataclysmic events that transformed the world – and continue to do so. Events which show us that even horrifying betrayal and death cannot win if we are committed to God.

So let us take the words of St Andrew of Crete to heart. 'Let us go together to meet Christ on the Mount of Olives. Let us spread before his feet not garments or lifeless olive branches which delight the eye for a few hours and then wither, but ourselves, clothed in his grace. We who have been baptised into Christ must ourselves be the garments that we spread before him. Let our souls take the place of the welcoming branches as we join today in the children's holy song: 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the king of Israel'.

Today, the journey begins!

Amen