

# Sunday Homily

## PALM SUNDAY

10 APRIL 2022

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“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

Luke 23:46

### Illustration

Dorothea was a pillar of her local church and her local community. She was at the centre of village life, interested in all that was going on and giving hours of her time to support worthwhile causes. She was greatly loved by the whole village and was like a steady rock, always there when needed. She also had a phenomenal knowledge of the village and its inhabitants, as she had lived there all her life. But one New Year, disaster struck. Dorothea suffered a massive stroke which hospitalised her for four months. After that she came home, but was bedridden and unable to move unaided. Worse, the stroke rendered her completely unable to speak. She could not utter a word. She changed from being a super-active person to being totally vulnerable and fully dependent on others for the slightest need, indeed, for life itself.

Yet, amazingly, Dorothea still had a vibrant ministry, albeit different. Once a month, half the church gathered around her bed at home for a Eucharist and this became a very special occasion. And despite the fact that talking to someone who is unable to respond verbally is difficult, visitors came in their droves and, after time in Dorothea's presence, somehow left feeling a lot better. Dorothea had given her spirit into God's hands and God was using her.

### Gospel Teaching

At the Last Supper, Jesus gave his final instructions to his friends. He showed them that they should always serve one another and he gave them broken bread and outpoured wine as a special way of remembering him. Then he went with them for an evening stroll in the Garden of Gethsemane and, while they slept, Jesus spent the time in prayer, building up his strength for what lay ahead.

After that, Jesus did nothing at all. He became totally vulnerable and fully dependent on others for the slightest need, indeed, for life itself. That vulnerability was abused and Jesus was killed, yet perhaps his finest moment was when he was hanging on the cross in agony. It was this moment that dragged the admission out of the centurion that “Truly, this was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

What a contrast between this end and the beginning of Holy Week, with Jesus' triumphant Palm Sunday procession, so full of promise. On the first Palm Sunday,

Jesus rode into Jerusalem as a king, but a king unlike any that had been envisaged. He rode not on a shining white charger with a huge military procession carrying flags and standards, but on a donkey with a ragbag of followers waving palm branches torn from the trees. It was a peasant procession, in direct and pointed contrast to the imperial entry into Jerusalem of any of the Roman officials. It fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah that a king would ride into the city on a donkey and would bring not war, but peace (Zechariah 9:9-10).

In the eyes of the world, Palm Sunday's triumphant procession might be thought of as a much better witness to God than a man hanging in abject agony on a cross. But the centre of Christianity is not Palm Sunday but the witness of the cross – Jesus Christ dying for love of human beings. Perhaps this witness was so powerful and effective not simply because an innocent man was prepared to die for his beliefs, but because, throughout his life, Jesus gave his spirit into God's hands so that God was able to use Jesus in the best possible way. Jesus' final cry on the cross, "It is finished, Father, into your hands I commend my spirit", is a fitting finale which expresses the means by which Jesus achieved his perfect sacrifice.

## Application

For many human beings, work has become that which defines their life. This may be voluntary work or paid work, but it means that for many people busyness is the most essential part of life. When that busyness is snatched away – through redundancy or illness or retirement or old age – people can feel useless and without worth. But all those who give their spirit into God's hands can be used by God in startling and unexpected ways.

For Jesus, the most powerful moment of his life was when he was completely helpless, hanging on a cross and utterly vulnerable. Dorothea's life, too, has become amazingly powerful since her stroke rendered her "useless".

Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit.