

“Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has removed the judgment against you, he has turned away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst, you have no further misfortune to fear. On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem: Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged! The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior. He will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love. He will sing joyfully because of you, as one sings at festivals” (Zephania 3:14-17).

On Passion Sunday, or more commonly “Palm Sunday,” we commemorate the Lord’s triumphant entrance into his own city, Jerusalem, and the beginning of the climax of his saving work, his suffering (or “passion”), death, and resurrection, which we celebrate with special solemnity each year during Holy Week. Holy Week is indeed a celebration, the most sacred celebration of the year, because the events we relive with Christ this week are the means of our salvation. Without the events of Holy Week, we would remain doomed to death and eternal darkness in our sin. But Christ removes the judgment against us and renews us in the Father’s love by suffering and dying himself on the cross. Christ’s triumphant entrance into Jerusalem marks the beginning of that saving sacrifice, and we rejoice at its nearness.

But our joy is a solemn one, because we know what our salvation cost. That is the other aspect of Holy Week. While we rejoice in our salvation, we mourn for what the removal of our judgment required of Christ and we weep for the unfathomable love he shows us by freely and willingly offering that sacrifice, love which we far too often take for granted and which we far too often fail to return. Holy Week is our annual opportunity to do both: to celebrate our salvation and to reflect deeply on Christ’s sacrifice and love for us. Commit some serious time this week to do both in your personal prayer, and plan on celebrating and reflecting on the events of our salvation as a community of faith at our parish’s Holy Week services, the schedule for which is on the front of the bulletin. Take advantage of this most sacred time of year, and may our celebration and reflection draw us more deeply than ever into God’s saving love.