The World Community for Christian Meditation

Published on *The World Community for Christian Meditation* (http://www.wccm.org)

Palm Sunday

Watch the exhilaration of an election victory, the successful candidate glorying in the adulation of the crowd and the intoxicating energy of hope and fresh purpose. Compare it with the tired, prematurely aged and battered politician who walks away with a few remaining shreds of dignity into retirement.

Today's iconic scene in the gospel story that we begin to concentrate on today after the Lenten preparation echoes this - but in reverse. Jesus enters Jerusalem borne on a wave of mass enthusiasm. The crowds strew palms before him and sing his praises. They expect great things of the latest messianic figure. Perhaps deep down they don't expect he will be different from previous ones but they need winners to compensate for their own sense of disappointment as we love the winners of The X Factor or long to touch the hem of the garment of celebrity.

The difference in this version of the story – as in the Passion and personal downfall that soon follows – is that the protagonist does not believe the myth he has been turned into. He understands himself and what is happening. At the centre of the turmoil a cool silence and presence of mind presides. In the coming days we have to distinguish clearly between the stark individuality of the central character and the mythical elements of the story. There is no easy resolution to this paradox. Lean to one extreme or the other and you miss the meaning. Jesus becomes merely a minor historical figure turned into a mythic icon that has caught the deeper imagination of humanity for two millennia.

To read the story that we embark on today we must allow it to read us. Our own hopes and despairs, mistakes and successes, will guide us into a story whose meaning penetrates all human experience. It then lifts us to a view of reality that transcends and transforms the one who sees it.

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