

# The Church

## Signification of Palm Sunday

**O**N the first Palm Sunday, our Blessed Saviour entered into the city of Jerusalem, followed by a great concourse of people, carrying branches of palms and boughs of olive in their hands and singing with raptures of exultation, filial hosannas to the Son of David.

It may seem surprising, that our Blessed Lord would allow any such external pomp and dignity to be shown Him, when we consider that He had on other occasions, hidden Himself from the faces of men. It was, as He declared Himself, "My kingdom is not of this world." The reason why He permitted the poor people of Jerusalem (for it was the lowly who followed Him) to exult and rejoice in their praises was to assist Him in fulfilling the prophecy of Zacharias, "Behold thy King will come to thee . . . riding upon an ass."

Our Divine Master entered Jerusalem rejoicing, to show us that He was full of joy, coming as He did in the spirit of meekness and sweetness to lay down His life in the bloody theatre of His passion, which in a very few days was to take place—thereby redeeming the human race from the thralldom of sin and the pit of unceasing damnation.

If our Divine Saviour were to come into one or many of the cities of America and the inhabitants were to greet Him with a triumph, as did the people of Jerusalem—it is more than likely that branches of maple, elm, poplar or pine would be used to spread upon the earth. The people of Jerusalem used the palm branch for the simple reason that palm trees adorn the streets of the Holy City as the maple or elm does in many American cities. The people were poor and had not the means to purchase anything else so they showed their gladness by using what God had given them in abundance—the palm branch.

The pagans decorated themselves, their horses and chariots with palm branches to signify victories. The Jews were already accustomed to express rejoicing on their great Feast of Taber-

nacles by holding the palm branch as a signal of victory. And the Christians of early times, in their numerous works of art, especially in their paintings, depicted the martyrs with palm branches as a symbol of their victory and triumph. Allusions have been made too, to the use of palms in the third century and also about the year 700 by the English Saint, the Venerable Bede. The precise time of the use of palms in our churches is not known but we do know in the early Middle Ages in the "miracle plays" or dramas of the Passion of Our Lord—palms were used to signify victory. And to us of the present age, the palm branch is a sign of victory because we know that it is an emblem of God's protection and the giving of grace.

Palms are blessed before the High Mass on Palm Sunday with a lengthy blessing. If a Bishop blesses them, it is performed from the throne and when a priest blesses them, it is performed at the Epistle side of the altar. It is then customary to give a branch of palm to each person in the congregation in order that they might hold them in their hands during the reading of the Passion or "long" Gospel. As palm is one of the many sacramentals of the faith, it should be preserved most reverently and by glancing at it through the year—recall to us the memory of our Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

Usually, the "palmetto species" of palm is used in this country and it is obtained from the low-lands of North Carolina to Florida. It is always procurable because it grows in abundance. However, other species (of which there are many) may be used and are used in different countries. In places where palm of some species cannot be obtained, branches of olive, box elder, spruce or other trees may be used and in such cases the *Caere-moniale Episcoporum* suggests that at least, little flowers or crosses made of palm be attached to these. From the palm which remains on Palm Sunday, the Ashes which are placed on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday—are made.