

Homily
Palm Sunday 5 April 2020
Fr Greg Barker

Twelve months ago, on sort of this date, we would have been gathering in large numbers to celebrate Palm Sunday. We would have taken our seats and made our selves comfortable where we had chosen to place our bodies and our bags, sorting our handbags, setting the kneeler and greeting our friends, family and those around us. Maybe we would have caught up on the news, began our prayers, nodded and smiled at those around us. Then you would have groaned good naturedly as I took to the lectern and invited you to move from your 'comfortable' seats and favoured positions to a position outside the Church for the blessing of Palms and the joy filled procession into the Church. All signs of our life as a family together.

You would have heard me invite you as you made the journey back into the Church to wave your palm branch with great vigour and to sing loudly the processional chant: 'Sing Hosanna to the King of kings'! Good naturedly again looking at each other to compare whether the neighbour was *actually* waving with vigour, or whether we were all more self-consciously waving gently the branch, slightly in front of the body, slightly hidden.

This is the one day normally where we get to be a lot more public about our faith. It compares in some ways nicely with the way we began Lent with ash proudly marking our foreheads. You remember being asked not to rub the ash off to early and not to creep home and hide but rather go about the daily business and proudly taking every opportunity to explain that it wasn't a dirty smudged but a sign of repenting in sackcloth and ashes of our personal sins but also the sins of our failures as a family together!!

Who would have thought last Palm Sunday or even this last Ash Wednesday which is only a few weeks ago that we would have been celebrating Palm Sunday by live streaming with all of you at home and with me holding the palms for you to collect at another day. To be fair to all they might sit in the church waiting for the day when we can all gather there again.

I wonder what Jesus was thinking as he rode into Jerusalem with all those people lining the streets, tearing branches from the trees and laying them in front of him?

It is hard to see today the pilgrimage and the completion of the Lenten journey that the procession with Palms symbolises. We know don't we that Jesus goes to Jerusalem to begin the more formalised process of last supper and crucifixion: the fulfilment of what he came to do. It comes at the end of his very public ministry and work with the disciples. They wont feel ready for what is about to unfold and they will at many parts along the way still get it wrong, still misunderstand what they are being readied for and of course they will still feel a great deal of fear and uncertainty as they try to make sense of all that is unfolding.

Does that feel a bit like what you are thinking and feeling right now? Not ready, uncertain, a little afraid of what the future has in store? Take heart then from today.

I feel like the giving up of Lent and the taking on some different aspects of life got a whole lot easier this year as we had to stay at home; gave up going out and mixing with others, which I also called taking on social distancing and self-isolating! Prayer time became easier to achieve suddenly, more opportunities for reconnecting with some I hadn't had time to speak with, and in that I have had to bit the bullet and learn some new ways of making contact – technology and social media platforms embraced. They have also been a challenge which has also seen them become part of the Lenten discipline.

And there have been some challenges I suspect for family as you have had to spend more hot house time with loved ones but also some great opportunities for taking on some good quality interaction particularly if you have turned off TV and played some of the more traditional and maybe old fashioned ways of being with your loved ones. Remember scrabble, cards, Cluedo and what was that noisy pop thingy game that rolled the dice automatically? Ludo? What about monopoly? And don't forget that the families still have some opportunity for learning some of the prayers of the Church like the rosary before dinner, bed, or the news! Reading the scriptures and talking about them is also a great opportunity for developing faith right now that is on offer.

I've heard too of virtual happy hours with golf friends, bridge clubs and coffee groups who through social media facetime or skype with some real conversations. And you will have seen in the newsletter an invitation to Zoom the rosary together. 'New' ways of taking on and giving up.

All part of the process of getting ready for what will be the new day of the Resurrection that we will celebrate in a way we have never done before next week. This pilgrimage we are on has so many new aspects to it. We have never worked our way through lent like this before but just like all pilgrimages and in particular the procession of palms it has so many positive aspects to it and still has the power to transform us: our family of faith. So stay positive, keeping singing 'Hosana to the King of Kings' and remember that each part of what we are called to do is part of God's plan for us.