



## **Palm Sunday, Year A – April 17, 2011**

Isaiah 50.4-9a; Psalm 118.1-2,19-29;  
Philippians 2.5-11; Matthew 21.1-11

### **An Exhortation delivered by the Venerable M. Ansley Tucker**

There aren't many non-negotiable expectations which the Church has of its members. But one of them is that we will keep Holy Week. There is no turning up next Sunday for the happy ending, without having trod the Way of the Cross in the meantime. Certainly Jesus stayed the course. From the moment he set his face to Jerusalem, he was committed to whatever befell him — unable even if he changed his mind (and he came pretty close) — to extract himself from the brutal humiliation which awaited him. And I do not know how we can claim to be followers of Jesus, and not follow.

It is no easy or pleasurable thing we are being asked to do. The services of the Solemn Triduum plunge us into darkness, guilt, grief, and pain. "Everybody Loves Raymond" is much more entertaining. Even changing your snow tires is more fun. But who wants a religion of pink cotton candy? — all sticky sweet fluff, and no substance. Any religion that is going to have the ring of truth will have to take the pain seriously. What is distinctive about the Christian gospel is that it puts pain, indeed innocent and gratuitously brutal suffering, right at the centre of its story. It is impossible truly to appreciate what it is to be a Christian, impossible to come to terms with either the privileges or the demands of our faith, apart from sitting in the presence of the suffering Christ — betrayed, denied, scorned, forsaken and slain. This is a call to prayer.

There is one other thing the Church asks of us in Holy Week. And this is to prepare for the annual renewal of the vows we made in our baptism. If during this Lent you have not yet taken the time to measure your life against the standard by which you promised to live it, I am asking you to do so. Have you been faithful in the Breaking of Bread and the prayers (and what constitutes faithfulness for you)? Have you respected the dignity of every human being (or are there certain categories of people we barely tolerate)? Have you persevered in resisting evil? And so on.

To prepare for the renewal of our baptismal vows involves a careful and kind examination of our conscience, repentance for those promises we have broken, and the formulation of specific intentions for the renewal of our covenant with God and each other. It is on this basis that the already baptised will be sprinkled with some of the water from the font at the Great Vigil.

For most Anglicans, this pause for review and renewal will be enough. But if you should find yourself in any way weighed down by your sense of failure and sin, please remember that there is provision in both our Prayer Books for personal confession, spiritual counsel, and absolution. This isn't just for those who have sinned more gravely than most of us could imagine; it is also (and in practice, most often) for those who don't find the healing they seek in the general absolution, and who need a word of personal assurance. The Anglican rule about confession is that all may, none must, some should. I am willing either to provide this ministry, or to recommend a confessor elsewhere. All you need to do is ask.

My brothers and sisters, I am your priest. You invited me to come here and keep you in Christ. You invited me to be the guardian of our baptismal covenant. And this is our Week of Weeks. In the name of Christ who is even now passing into

the hands of those who mean him ill, I beg you to find your place along the Via  
Dolorosa, and to keep watch.

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