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A STUDY IN CONTRASTS
Homily for Palm Sunday B
LPC, 3/25/18

I never like to preach a standard-length on Palm Sunday because the Passion narrative is so long and so wrenching. My usual practice is to offer instead a brief meditation. Today I base my remarks on a quotation from Richard Rohr.

Richard Rohr is a Franciscan friar who has quite a following among contemplative Christians. He issues a daily meditation to subscribers over the internet. I'd like to read you one of his meditations from this past week.

Christianity is a lifestyle - a way of being in the world that is simple, non-violent, shared, and loving. However, we made it into an established "religion" (and all that goes with that) and avoided the lifestyle change itself. One could be warlike, greedy, racist, selfish, and vain in most of Christian history, and still believe that Jesus is one's "personal Lord and Savior" . . . The world has no time for such silliness anymore. The suffering on Earth is too great.

This resonated with me as I planned for Palm Sunday, because it, like the Palm Sunday liturgy, is a study in contrasts. Rohr comments on the contrast between what being a follower of Jesus is supposed to be like, based on the life and teachings of our savior, and the way many Christians throughout history have lived their lives, claiming Jesus as Lord and Savior while living belligerent, greedy, selfish and vain lives.

On Palm Sunday, we begin with a reenactment of Christ's entry into Jerusalem the week before his arrest and execution. The mood for this is joyous and triumphant. With palms in hand we shout, "Hosanna!" readily stepping into the role of the welcoming crowd. Then, within minutes we step into the role of Christ's enemies, shouting, "Crucify him!" This dizzying and schizophrenic transition makes some people so uncomfortable that they avoid coming to church on Palm Sunday. Talk about contrasts!

One reason to subject ourselves to this uncomfortable thing is to recognize, for one day at least, our propensity for doing exactly what Richard Rohr describes: being more than willing to identify as Christians without applying Christian principles to our lives. We are more than willing to shout, "Hosanna!" but then our actions and attitudes, if not our actual voices, shout, "Crucify him!"

On this day we can at least recognize that in our attitudes and actions we let Jesus down. A lot. But the purpose of this is not to wallow in self-loathing. The purpose of this is to ready ourselves to walk with Jesus through the final week of his life before his death. Jesus suffered. A lot. And all for the purpose of walking with us through our suffering and our many deaths. If Jesus did this for us, we can, during this Passion Week, in some small way, do the same for him.

This is hard. This is challenging. Change is always hard and challenging. But God's will for us is that we not remain in what Rohr calls the "silliness" of claiming Jesus as savior while remaining warlike, greedy, racist, selfish and vain, and get on with the truly Christian, truly Christ-life business of addressing the suffering on Earth.