

Here I am.

Why does the Church's Palm Sunday liturgy (in normal times) include an actual procession of celebrant, acolytes and parishioners waving palm branches prior to their entry into the church edifice itself - as into Jerusalem? Because it wants you not only to *hear* St. Matthew's Palm Sunday reading but to *experience* it – to **be** there, as it were; despite the long passage of years since the original moment.

But more than that, Christian spirituality would encourage you to imagine *your very self* as Jerusalem, open to the triumphal arrival of Jesus within your own mind and heart. Which raises the question: how would you personally receive him? As someone to welcome? Or as someone to worry about, considering the effect his arrival might have on your everyday lifestyle? Note that Matthew says: *The whole city was shaken and asked: "Who is this?"* Certainly the Temple scribes were concerned about his intentions.

Or as Christ approaches *you* as another Jerusalem to enter, maybe the alternative question should be: *Who are you?* I might answer that question in many ways impersonally as name, rank and serial number. Indeed, my identity at various stages of my life might be stated as seminarian, Philadelphian, Catholic, American, male, student, husband, parent, teacher, consultant, bureaucrat . . . by where I came from or the things I did or the roles I played. Yet such identifications seem all so shallow, because anyone who knew me by that array of tags would know very little about me. They *label* me more than reveal me. Indeed, caught up in, even preoccupied by all *those* identifications, I hardly had time to know myself. I would have had a very hazy notion of *who* I am compared to that clear list of *what* I am and have been.

Yet somewhere deep within each of us there is a self or a potential that in a crisis may step into the spotlight – out of concealment – as did Abraham and Moses and David at turning points in their lives – and say: *Here I am! Present at last* beyond all the masks we have worn to survive from day to day. Or as the poet in Psalm 40 says it: . . . *my ears have been opened . . . Then I said, Here I am. I have come . . . to do your will, my God.*

It's as though out of the recesses of our human being there is an authenticity, an *I am* or *This is the real me* that Jesus by way of everyday "Palm Sunday" arrivals wants to grasp and bring out into the open – as he did the dormant Lazarus – to be God's creative, caring, courageous presence in this City of Mankind.

I have lived a long time and I think that, like blind Bartimaeus or the diminutive Zacchaeus who caught Jesus' eye as he processed to Jerusalem, my essential self has begun to move out of the shadows – but perhaps never before so irresistibly since my spouse has become demented over these past six years. *Here I am* is my persistent response to her needs, her distant appeal, which somehow makes these years more meaningful than the decades when *what* I was prevailed over *who* I was. Christ brings love to Jerusalem – authentic love.

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