

# Passion: the Path of God



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## PALM SUNDAY

*Is. 50:4-7; Phil. 2:6-11; Mt. 26:14-27:66*

**T**he Sunday that introduces us into the heart of the Liturgical Year presents us with two elements that don't seem to harmonize. On the one hand, the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, ritualized in the symbol of the palms, evokes joy and exultation. On the other hand, the account of the Passion (this year from the Gospel of Matthew) gives a tragic overtone to the decisive hours leading up to the premature end of the Master's life.

It is not easy to harmonize these two elements but it needs to be done since, from the first generation of Christians onward, the account of the Passion of Jesus is the path by means of which we learn a great lesson. In fact it was through the unjust and unexpected end of Jesus of Nazareth that God led humanity to redemption from sin and death, revealing an image of himself that is profoundly different from standard religious imagery of God.

In Matthew's account of the Passion, what is striking is the amount of space dedicated to Judas and Pilate (26:14-16; 27:11-30) and to the woman from Bethany (26:6-13), whose loving act stands in bold contrast to these two figures. In recounting the woman's behavior, Matthew underscores the falsely scandalized reaction of the disciples, who are angry because the costly ointment in its elegant alabaster jar was poured out on the head of the Master and thus "wasted." His head was anointed, not his feet—a sign of the woman's unconscious recognition of him as God's Anointed One and hence her reverent act, juxtaposed to the behavior of those who conspired against him. The scene reveals the originality of the Gospel, which is always contrary to human logic (a business and utilitarian mentality), leaving one surprised by a love that appears to be "wasted"—to be an unacceptable "luxury"—while instead it is the sole condition for changing history. The prophetic words of the Master confirm this: "The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me" (26:11).

In addition to the courageous and intuitive woman, twisted and controversial figures appear in the Passion drama and then disappear. Judas is drawn to the Master but he lacks the strength to wholeheartedly welcome a non-political Messiah—one who witnesses to poverty and self-stripping to the point of martyrdom and who fails to bring about an immediate change in things. Pontius Pilate, a disenchanting and cynical Roman, senses the deception into which he is slipping but is not free enough to refuse to play his assigned role in the drama to which his name will always be connected.

*Fr. Domenico Pompili*

### TIME OF THE PASSION

***We have begun the time of the Passion and once again we must strive to understand what this means. From the very beginning, Jesus chose the way of the Cross because it is the way to God through the world. And we travel this path alongside him....***

*(D. Bonhoeffer)*