

Palm Sunday (C)'22

- I'm sure that the war being waged in Ukraine has been deeply affecting you.
- It certainly causes great despondency in me as I consider possible wider ramifications as other nations become involved, & I think of Pope Francis' words a few days ago when he referred to "the infantile & destructive aggression that threatens us."
- As I reflected on today's feast, I thought of films that portrayed 'showdowns' of the good force coming into town, down the main street to confront the evil force of an oppressive power – you know, like the Westerns – where the good guy comes into a town long oppressed by outlaws & in a blaze of gunfire, manages to shoot & kill everyone of them; or in war films where the allied troops roll into the town & liberate it with guns & mortar from the oppressive forces that have unjustly subdued its population for so long.
- Then I thought of the complete contrast exhibited by someone like Iesha Evans, a young black woman in a flowing dress, standing with her arms crossed, who confronted a line of heavily armed police in riot gear in July 2016 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, at a protest against shootings of black men by police.
- Or the image of the man who came to be known as the 'Tank Man' who stood in the way of a line of military tanks during the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989.
- And today we have Jesus riding into Jerusalem for a showdown.
- For days, tension had been building in Jerusalem.
- The crowds were full of expectation, anticipating a Messianic Liberator in the great warrior tradition of King David.
- Surely he would enter Jerusalem on a magnificent warhorse?
- But, what did they get? A lowly figure riding on a donkey – what a disappointment. Jesus confounded expectations.
- The crowd & disciples applauded, but, as we know, the crowd proved fickle, soon baying for his blood: 'Crucify him'.
- Jesus was left exposed to Pontius Pilate, the embodiment of state power, & Pilate had this non-violent revolutionary put to death.
- Jesus was martyred by a squad of Roman soldiers.
- Why? What sort of threat did he really pose to the great Roman Empire?
- He posed a threat to the customary way of doing things.
- Both the supporters & opponents of Roman rule preferred the terrorist, Barabbas, to be freed – they at least knew which box to put him in.
- They couldn't deal with Jesus, the preacher of active, revolutionary non-violence because their way of doing things was always based on violence.
- Why did Jesus renounce violence?
- Why did he later demand that Peter put his sword back in its scabbard?

- I think largely because he knew how the innocent suffer terribly in these conflicts, particularly women & children – those without weapons.
- He says to the women of Jerusalem as he laboured up the hill of Calvary: *'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me. Weep rather for yourselves & for your children...'*
- Jesus discarded the macho lens through which wars are viewed.
- But over the centuries we haven't learnt – leaders of nations & ethnic groups behave like children in the school yard, except they have weapons, & here we are today, exercising the same ways of dealing with conflict.
- But ordinary people all around the world, are challenging the "customary way of doing things", because they do not work - ways that need to be changed because people are yearning for peace.
- He saw, he sees, that it is women & children who suffer grievously in warfare:
 - the loss of fathers, husbands, sons killed on the battlefield;
 - sexual abuse employed as an instrument to terrorise the civilian population, or enforced prostitution, sexual slavery;
 - the anguish of not knowing the fate of those who have been 'disappeared' during conflict.
- Jesus knew all this, knows all this, & his heart broke for the innocent & powerless, especially women & children bearing the consequences of armed conflict: *'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me. Weep rather for yourselves & for your children...'*
- We can admire Jesus in his being willing to remain vulnerable & not to rouse his followers to violence to protect himself, let alone throw off Roman rule, but he was executed.
- It takes creative imagination, inspired by the Spirit of Truth & Peace, to actively strive for resolution of conflict by non-violent means.
- And it takes Christian love – the love Jesus lived out & died for, that has any real power to bring change & justice for all those unjustly treated.
- The Church in our own time should reflect on its history of pacifism in its first 300 years & model ways of conflict resolution that effects changes that bring justice.
- What we celebrate at Easter is God's justice & love for us, & especially for the broken & wounded, that they be vindicated against all odds, even death.
- As we celebrate Passion Sunday, we pray in thanks to a God who places himself in solidarity with the weak & voiceless in our world and we pray that we might be impassioned to show a love, care & concern for God's creation & his people, to the point that we may have to sacrifice, suffer & even die by being on the side of goodness & love; to develop & practise a logic to effect a justice & peace-making that is different from that which we've employed for too long.