

Factions and Intrigue Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord/A April 9, 2017 9:00 AM
Mt 21:1-11; Is 50:4-7; **Mt 26:14—27:66** (Jesus in his humanity walked very cautiously and prayed very fervently about what to do. And we are invited to participate in that.)

Our liturgy and the gospel itself has a tendency to **compress events that take place over a long period of time into a short period of celebration.** So the **triumphal entry into Jerusalem** that began this service **probably took place six months before Passover.** In fact the use of palms and olive branches is associated with the autumnal feast of Tabernacles. And there was therefore a rather long period of time between that moment of triumph until the passion when the crowds cry: “Crucify him.” There was **a lot of ferment and unrest going on among the people. Historians say that there were serious divisions and factions** in both the Judean population and their leaders and among the Roman governors and rulers.

In the midst of all this intrigue, some groups like the Zealots—that means fanatics—probably thought Jesus would be their ally or hoped he would be their ally. Maybe Herod and his party thought Jesus could be used for their purposes. Maybe even Pontius Pilate in his shenanigans with allies within the Roman Empire, thought Jesus could be put to good use. But in six months it became obvious this was not going to work. **Jesus was loyal only to the Father.** He really lived the way he taught and he did believe that those who live by the sword die by the sword. And thus **he became useless to all the political and religious factions who wanted to overwhelm their enemies and get control or preserve control, as in the case of the chief priests.**

So it was a very turbulent time, and we should imagine that **Jesus in his humanity walked very cautiously and prayed very fervently about what to do. And we are invited to participate in that** because it should be reflected in our own lives because **we are all called to build the kingdom of God with the means given to us in the Spirit even in our own troubled time.** So if you want to have the best ever Easter—people always want practical suggestions—I have a real practical suggestion. Go to your computer, go into your address book, select “all,” and write this note: “Dear friend, I’m not available until next Monday”; and then turn off your television and turn off your radio and **get out your Bible and prayerfully reflect on this gospel.**