

From Hosanna to Crucifixion

We just heard the people greet Jesus with “Hosannas,” an acclamation with messianic overtones, while they threw their cloaks and palm leaves in his path as he entered Jerusalem.

And then just a little while later, we heard the people shouting “Let him be crucified!”

How many times have you wondered “What happened?”

I certainly have ... every time I read or heard that gospel!

How could things go so wrong for Jesus?

How could things go from welcoming ... to death ... in such a short time?

Were these people such fair weather friends that they would turn on Jesus so quickly?

A close reading of Matthew’s Gospel tells us. I guess I just haven’t looked for the answer in the right way before now.

The Holy Father spells it out clearly for us in his newly published book, *Jesus of Nazareth – Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*.

The people who welcomed Jesus into the city of Jerusalem were people who had come with him ... mostly from the villages of Bethany and Bethpage.

The Gospel we heard before the Procession talked of “the crowds preceding ... and those following.” These are people who had seen his miracles and heard him preach ... who had shared the road with Him.

Most of the people of Jerusalem had been focused on what was going on in their city, in their daily lives, with the Roman occupiers, and at the Temple, and had not heard of this Jesus, this Prophet, this Son of God, who just might be the Messiah.

There were a lot of self-proclaimed prophets in the countryside ... even a lot of people claiming to be the Messiah. If the citizens of Jerusalem had heard of Jesus, they surely must have consigned him to the category of another delusional, self-proclaimed prophet. And being of the city, they were under the sway of the Temple leadership, men who had a lot to lose if the fire of belief in Jesus as Messiah should catch on in Jerusalem.

And just like in Matthew’s birth narrative, it was foreigners and others outside Jerusalem who first knew and honored Jesus ... while the reports about Jesus – in both the birth and passion narratives – left Jerusalem “shaken” and “greatly troubled.”

As Christians, we think of ourselves as that first group of revelers, welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem ... and into our hearts ... but there are others ... even today ... who would side themselves with the ravaging crowd who demanded his death.

But even if we align with the crowd who cried “Hosanna” when Jesus entered into Jerusalem, we have to ask ourselves if we would have abandoned Him at the first sign of trouble.

After all, where were these people when Jesus was arrested and brought to trial? Surely, at least some of them must have still been in the city!

But remember ... even Peter denied Jesus!

At the foot of the cross there were only three of His disciples ... and one of them was His mother!

Martyrs abound in the history of Christianity ... and there are more each day ... but most of us will never be called to give up our lives for our faith.

But would we challenge those who would disregard Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross? Would we stand up for our faith? Or would we just walk away and state: “I do not know the man!”

I’d like to think that I’d stand up for my faith ... that I’d stand up for Jesus.

What would you do?