

# Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion



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As we celebrate Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, we are reminded that Lent is coming to close and the Resurrection is nearing. What have you learned about yourself this Lent? What have you learned about your relationship with God?

## Palms vs. Passion

BY FATHER LARRY RICE

Each year at around this time, as Lent draws to a close, and Easter nears, Catholics everywhere look at their parish bulletins, missalettes, and publications, and wonder why the last Sunday in Lent is called "Passion Sunday" and not "Palm Sunday."

The formal designation changed in 1970; still, many people are much more accustomed to calling it "Palm Sunday."

The palms, of course, are a commemoration of the ancient custom of covering the path of an honored person as he passed by. In many parts of the Near East, this was among the highest honors, often reserved for royalty. All four of the Gospels speak of Jesus receiving this honor as he entered triumphantly into Jerusalem, days before his execution. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the crowds are said to have laid their cloaks in the street, as well as cut rushes. Only John's Gospel specifically mentions palm fronds.

It's the custom in Catholic churches to give people palms that are blessed at the beginning of the liturgy and carried in procession at the start of the mass. It is many people's private custom to weave these palms into crosses or other shapes during the liturgy. I would like to believe that they're not doing this during my homily, but experience tells me they are.





## PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION

Ultimately, the celebration of this day isn't about the palms, any more than the celebration of Christmas is about decorated evergreen trees. As the prayers and scripture readings make clear, the liturgy is really about Christ's passion—his willingness to suffer for our salvation and the forgiveness of our sins. By the end of the reading of the passion narrative, the palms seem sad and ironic, as the crowds who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem would be transformed into the crowd shouting "Crucify him!" during his trial. Human fickleness and frailty are contrasted with Jesus' integrity and courage.

So, it makes sense to call it "Passion Sunday." Still, old customs and old terminology don't change easily.

### Holy Week

The summit of the Liturgical Year is the Easter Triduum—from the evening of Holy Thursday to the evening of Easter Sunday. Though chronologically three days, they are liturgically one day unfolding for us the unity of Christ's Paschal Mystery.

The single celebration of the Triduum marks the end of the Lenten season, and leads to the Mass of the Resurrection of the Lord at the Easter Vigil.

We look forward to celebrating these liturgical services that take place during the Triduum with you:

**Holy Thursday—April 9, 2020**  
Mass of the Lord's Supper

**Good Friday—April 10, 2020**  
Good Friday of the Lord's Passion

**Easter Sunday—April 12, 2020**  
Mass of the Resurrection of the Lord

