

Palm Sunday

St Mark's, Tampa

28 March 2010

There are just two things in this whole story that are pure and unsullied, fit for sacred use, fit to bear the Son of Man.

One is a witless animal, and one is a hunk of rock.

The colt has never been ridden. It is for Jesus alone. And he rides on the colt – a royal procession on a most un-royal animal – but it is an animal that is pure and unsullied, fit for sacred use, fit to bear the Son of Man.

The tomb has never been used. It is for Jesus alone. And his body is placed in the tomb – a dwelling of death for the Lord of Life – but it is a tomb that is pure and unsullied, fit for sacred use, fit to bear the Son of Man.

A witless animal, and a hunk of rock: they are for Jesus, and for Jesus alone. But everyone and everything else is filthy and decayed, used up in frivolous disputes about rank and power, ready to betray Jesus out of selfish greed or to deny him out of weakness and embarrassment, too sleepy to keep watch with him, too preoccupied to understand what he is saying to them, too insecure to see him as anything but a threat.

They are not fit for sacred use, not fit to have any dealings with the Son of Man. But he pours out his life for them, and washes them clean with his holy blood, so that he can make them fit, and his last words are words of forgiveness and grace.

We do not live for Jesus alone. We are not fit for sacred use. We are not fit to bear the Son of Man. In our filth and frivolity, in our jockeying for position and prestige, in our readiness to put anything and everything ahead of Jesus, to deny him out of weakness and embarrassment, in our weariness and preoccupation and insecurity, we see how unfit we are – and yet Jesus pours out his life for us, and washes us clean with his holy blood, and offers us words of forgiveness and grace, and calls us to his table so that he can give himself to us as food and drink.

The great Anglican priest and poet, George Herbert, says what I want to say so much better than I can. In a poem simply called "Love," he has a dialogue with Love – Love is what he calls Jesus – about his own unworthiness, his unfitness to accept Love's

invitation. I've asked Mary Alice to read the words that Love says, and I will read the words of the poet, which are words that each of us can say as we contemplate Love's great sacrifice:

LOVE bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
 If I lack'd anything.

'A guest,' I answer'd, 'worthy to be here:'
 Love said, '**You shall be he.**'
'I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
 I cannot look on Thee.'
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
 '**Who made the eyes but I?**'

'Truth, Lord; but I have marr'd them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.'
'**And know you not,**' says Love, '**Who bore the blame?**'
 'My dear, then I will serve.'
'**You must sit down,**' says Love, '**and taste my meat.**'
 So I did sit and eat.

Come to this Table, and let Love himself feed you, and make you pure and unsullied, fit for sacred use, fit to bear the Son of Man.