

Palm Sunday, the start of Holy Week, the central and key part of our Christian year; who would have thought that we would have to celebrate today and mark this week apart? This, of course, is the reality of our time and it is not the first time that Christians have been obliged to keep this mostly Holy of weeks in a non-standard way. The important thing is that we DO keep it, that we DO reflect, pray and worship and, at least this year, I won't have to worry about anything clashing with a rugby match! (Oh come on it's been ages since I have had a dig)

As always one of the things that strike me about today is the way so many people were cheering and clapping Jesus one day and then jeering and booing less than a week later. Were they the same people? Had they changed their minds so radically, so quickly? Or was it simply 'rent-a-mob' who had it their own way on the Friday? If so, where had all the cheerers gone? Where were the supporters?

Human beings can be very fickle; what is today's big thing is tomorrow's has been. We are quick to cheer but, unfortunately, very quick to boo – especially if we think everyone else is doing it too. We are, sadly, very much like sheep; we see a group cheering and celebrating and we are keen to join in, sometimes without even wondering about the cause. Hey any excuse for a party! I saw this a few times as an officer. Every now and then we would be asked to escort some parade or demonstration; the key people knew why they were there and what it was all about but there were a heck of a lot who joined in just because they saw a crowd.

Jesus, of course, knew why he was there; God coming to his own to save them from themselves, but no one else knew – not even the disciples (they never listened). Jesus came to do what needed to be done and he would do it no matter what the crowd did or didn't do. Even so just a fraction of the support he received today would have gone a long way to helping as he walked his final journey to Calvary. Instead he faced his last challenge alone; the crowd now jeering, his friends nowhere to be found, the only aid offered was a stranger from the crowd dragged in by the soldiers.

I have found myself thinking about this a lot over the last couple of weeks. Twice now we have been called to 'pause for applause'. Communities have been called to stand and clap, cheer, bang pans to show their appreciation and support for our National Health Service and all essential workers. Rightly so! They deserve our support and all the encouragement we can give them. They deserve palm leaves and a hero's welcome. They deserve our consideration and our resolve to do all we can to make it easier for them..... but what happens after it is all over? What happens when we 'get back to normal'? Will we remember with gratitude or will we, like the residents of Jerusalem, be quick to forget and quicker to condemn?

I'm going to get radical now, so hang onto your seats! Somewhere at the beginning of all this I pointed out that the essential workers were all, or mostly, in lower paid jobs. There were no footballers, actors, personal injury lawyers or hedge-fund managers among them. They were all people who keep our society going and usually with very little thanks and beggar all pay. Our NHS has been run on a shoe string, our care system left to run down, our schools having to pay for their

resources out of teachers' pockets, our food networks run for the benefit of stockholders. How many times did we hear, and yet ignore, the cry for more recognition and more funding?

Do you think we have learnt our lesson? Do you think we will, finally, put a premium on our social care system? I wish I knew. I am afraid that, at this point, my cynicism kicks in and thinks that we will go back to being Mr & Mrs I'm all right Jack; I really pray that, this time, my cynical mind will be proved wrong.

After all this is over please, I beg you, remember to value and support our key workers and our key social systems. Continue to give them the honour they deserve AND the funding that they need. Don't let the cheers of today become the jeers of tomorrow. Hold our politicians and business leaders to account and don't let our carers be sacrificed on the crosses of profit and gain.

God bless you all and may you have a meaningful and holy Holy Week.

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