

A day of triumph

Patsy McGregor *reflects on* Psalm 118:1-2. 19-end and John 12:12-16

As we flew in by helicopter to the Madagascar rainforest, a large crowd gathered to see the hovering machine land on the football pitch. Singing at the top of their lungs, having walked miles to greet us, people were ecstatic in anticipation of the new church and health clinic. Palm branches were woven into festive green arches and placed at the village entrance. Yet for all that, this was not quite the dignified arrival you might imagine. My husband slipped in a mud puddle and – whoosh – he was suddenly flat on the ground, covered in mud. The crowd broke out in laughter, and happily everyone saw the humour in the situation.

Today's Gospel tells of a humble man riding into Jerusalem on a young donkey, amid cheers and waving palm branches. Many of those waving branches had doubtless seen Jesus' miracles and heard his teachings in Galilee. There is a sense that they are responding to the psalmist's exhortation to: "Bind the festal procession with branches... O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good."

But what was Jesus feeling while all of this was going on? Knowing what he did about where this path was leading, were his feelings out of kilter with the atmosphere of triumphant joy that surrounded him and the colt?

Has someone ever congratulated you for something and you thought, in the back of your mind, "If you only knew...?" 🙄

Dear Lord, thank you for making that final journey. I will rejoice, being glad in this day because you have made it and because I know that your journey ultimately ends in the triumph of life over death. Amen.

The Church Fathers

Part 2, Ignatius and Polycarp

by Richard Gunning

Richard Gunning continues our look at the early Church Fathers.

The fact that being a Christian was a capital offence seemed actually to encourage some of the early Fathers to provoke the authorities. Ignatius (c. 35-108), Bishop of Antioch, ordered that his friends should not try to obtain his release from Roman captivity as he wanted to suffer as Jesus had. He predicted that he would be thrown to beasts, which, if later reports are to be

believed, indeed came to pass. His friend Polycarp (c. 69-155) had been a disciple of the apostle John, who had ordained him Bishop of Smyrna. Some scholars believe that Polycarp (which means "much fruit" in Greek) was responsible for the assembly and publication of the New Testament. When in old age Polycarp was hauled before the authorities and asked to renounce his faith, he said: "These eighty-six years I have been the Lord's servant, and he has never let me down. Shall I revile him now?" 🙄



Entry of Jesus in Jerusalem by Charles Blakeman, St Etheldreda's Church, London

Palm Sunday

by Lisa Tulfer

A single reference in John's Gospel has given rise to the traditions celebrated in many churches today. The other Gospels mention people spreading their robes and leafy branches on the road, giving Jesus a kind of early version of the red carpet treatment. Only John specifies palm trees. In different climates, seasonally available greenery such as willow or olive is used in Palm Sunday processions.

In many churches, the palm crosses carried today will be

burned to provide the ashes for next year's Ash Wednesday services. And in England in Shakespeare's time, a straw and rag effigy known as Jack o' Lent (possibly representing Judas Iscariot, or harking back to pre-Christian spring rites) was created on Ash Wednesday, paraded around the parish to be pilloried and abused, then finally burned on Palm Sunday.

Lisa is a freelance writer and translator, who writes mainly non-fiction and poetry. Her passions are history, knitting and photography. 🙄

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

Matthew 5:6