

A week, so the proverbial wisdom has it is a long time in politics. And here we stand at the start of another week, but this week, though it indeed starts with politics, is a week that quickly moves beyond the chronological units of seven days, a week that will be re-run and replayed, year in, year out, declaring the death and resurrection of Jesus until he comes again. It is not quite a week without end, but it is a week without boundaries, a week quite unlike any other. Now starts Holy Week.

It starts right here on Palm Sunday with politics; with the faintly ridiculous political scene of a crazy Jewish cult welcoming its leader into Jerusalem. A swelling of patriotic pride is sparked, incoherent hopes are stirred, the fire of aspirations joins the heat of the Judaeen spring, frustrations bubble close to the surface and wake the slumbering beast that is Rome. Ten horns stir, seven heads briefly turn, and the dream very suddenly becomes a nightmare. The week ends with the typically ham-fisted but eminently political solution of judicial murder.

Jesus starts the week in triumph: he enters Jerusalem in state, acclaimed as its king to shouts of Hosanna and the decimation of local greenery. How proud his followers must be, how their hearts must swell in their breasts as the victor's palms are strewn before him.

Jesus leaves Jerusalem before the week's end in a very different way, not in princely state, but as a condemned criminal; not carried on a donkey but carrying a cross; the prince of Judah leaves his capital a king with a wooden crown, the piercing wood of thorns, not praised with palm branches but mocked with a reed. The only royal banner that is raised is Jesus hung on the cross, the colour that clothes this king is not the regal purple but the dark deep crimson of his own blood.

And yet it is this bitter, painful journey, this journey of agony and shame, the journey we remember, relive and make present again this Holy Week, it is the journey to Calvary that is the real victory parade, not the glitzy, showy and too soon emptied pageant of Palm Sunday.

Today, witness the hollow hopes of the overthrow of earthly powers; on Friday, the final conquest of the spiritual powers; today, a welling of desires for a better life, on Friday, the price paid for eternal life; today, the pomp and ceremony of the king of

the Jews; on Friday the coronation of Christ the creator King. It is the sublimity of redemption that will show just how ridiculous the world political is.

For that mocking coronet of thorns that will garland Jesus' head is the crowning achievement of humanity, humanity that had ever since Adam and Eve imagined only disobedience as the way to get what it wants. It is the same humanity that hid in shame from God as he walked in the evening breeze in the garden of Eden that now drags the incarnate God from the night of the Garden of Gethsemane to walk in the scorching heat of the noon day to the peak of our collective shame on Calvary. But this time we do not find ourselves expelled from Eden to toil and tears lest we eat the fruit of eternal life. This time, we are invited to sit as guests of honour at the Lord's table and we are offered those delicacies on a plate.

This time— though our human pride leads us into far greater and darker crimes than snacking on forbidden fruit— this time one man's obedience, one man's refusal to bow to peer pressure and worship idols made of human hands, one man's love, transforms man's darkest moment. The humanity that ate the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, that killed its brother in the field of Cain and in a million other fields thereafter, that made the golden calf and a million other idols, that made bigger, better and heavier yokes for its neighbours back; that same humanity, in Jesus, at Calvary, on the Cross, finally becomes what it always should have been.

The humanity of disobedience, of rebellion, of sin is redeemed by the second Adam's loving obedience to the Father. Human pride is finally conquered by divine-human humility. The runaway juddering juggernaut of our sin comes to a dead halt at the foot of the cross.

So here we stand at the start of Holy Week, outside the walls of Jerusalem ready to greet our king as he comes to claim the city and claim the fealty of its people. It is a stirring, it is a momentous place to stand. But let us remember that the palm of victory we hold in our hands today comes in the shape of a cross; and the Cross is shape of the true victory.