



No to crucifixion – bishops

Roman Catholics mark Palm Sunday today

By CHRISTINA I. HERMOSO
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“The real expression of Christian faith during Lent is through repentance and self-denial.”

Bishop Dinualdo Gutierrez stressed this as he discouraged penitents from performing practices such as crucifixion and self-flagellation, and other similar acts during the Holy Week.

“People should avoid self-flagellation. There are many ways of repenting for our sins,” he said over Church-run Radio Veritas.

Another Catholic prelate, Bishop Rolando Tirona, likewise, expressed his disapproval of self-flagellation and crucifixion by Catholic penitents which, he said, “are expressions of superstitious beliefs and are usually done out of the need for money and for tourism purposes which is totally wrong.”

“The Lenten season is a sacred celebration for reflection and repentance and not for money-making. But you can’t judge them. But if it is done out of tourism, that is unacceptable. That is deception,” he said.

Bishop Tirona said the Catholic Church allows Holy Week activities that are consistent with the teachings of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ.

“It is enough to remember the life and death of Jesus Christ during Holy Week through fasting, abstinence, prayer, reflection, and almsgiving.”

Meanwhile, Catholics mark Palm Sunday today, the sixth and last Sunday of Lent.

The world’s estimated 1.28 billion Catholics will gather in cathedrals and churches this Sunday, waving palm fronds and olive branches amid the silence of cathedral bells in memory of the homecoming of Jesus riding a donkey to the city of Jerusalem on a pedestal of admiration from thousands of cheering followers to embark on His earthly mission of salvation.

Palm Sunday of the Lord’s Passion commemorates the triumphant entry of Christ into Jerusalem astride a donkey where a huge jubilant crowd welcomed Him waving palm fronds and strewing His path with boughs cut from trees in an outpouring of joy and jubilation, chanting

“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

In Catholic churches this Sunday, priests in scarlet vestments, the color of blood to symbolize the supreme redemptive sacrifices of Christ, will lead the principal religious ceremonies of the day: The blessing of palms, the procession, the Eucharistic celebration, and during the mass, the singing of the Passion of Christ according to the Gospel of St. Matthew, which recalls the final week of Jesus’ life on earth.

In all masses this Sunday, the complete narrative of the Passion of Christ will be read “as a reminder of the obedience of Christ which, through His Holy Cross, brought salvation to the world.”

On the church altar, branches of palms will be placed between the candlesticks instead of flowers. The blessing of palms follows a ritual similar to that of the mass.

Used as a sacramental by the faithful, the palm fronds are traditionally preserved in prominent places at home in the belief that "the right hand of God will expel all adversities, bless, and protect those who dwell in them who have been redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ."

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, "the branches of palms signify victory over death and the advent of spiritual victory through Christ. The Death and Resurrection of Christ bring us closer to eternal life as man becomes one with God and God becomes one again with man."

For centuries, palm branches have been used by all nations as an emblem of joy and victory over enemies.

In Christianity, it is a sign of victory over the flesh and the world (Psalm 91:13).

Palm Sunday sets the tone of self-control, restraint, and moderation in temporal desires for the rest of the Holy Week as forms of Lenten sacrifice, while retreats and confessions will be held in parishes daily in preparation for the Holy Week.

At the same time, fasting and abstinence are leading forms of self-sacrifice and personal deprivation serving as a forceful spiritual preparation in the spirit of the Lenten Season as Jesus prepared for His forthcoming Passion.

In unspeakable humility, the Son of God had embraced and prepared for His supreme sacrifice as had long been written by the prophets before it came to pass, to accomplish His greatest mission of bringing back His people to the doorstep of Salvation. (With a report from Brenda Piquero)

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