

Every year on Palm Sunday, this is the moment when we make a switch. We've been focusing on Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. But now we flick the switch, and start to focus on Jesus' passion and death. And central to Holy Week are two readings of the Passion of Jesus in the Gospels. On Good Friday every year we hear the Passion according to John. But on Palm Sunday, we read one of the other Gospel accounts in a three-year rotation. This year we read the Passion according to Luke.

I don't preach a full sermon on Palm Sunday. The Passion is long, and it pretty much speaks for itself. But before we begin, I want to give you one thought to ponder.

Our Orthodox brothers and sisters have some wonderful and unique liturgical customs that western churches like ours don't experience. One of them centers around a cloth called the *Epitaphios*. The Epitaphios is a cloth with a depiction of the dead body of Jesus Christ. The Orthodox use it in various ways on Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and on Easter. One of their customs is to carry this cloth with the body of Christ in a sort of funeral procession. They will often take the cloth outside, and around the church, or even around the town in a larger procession. But then they bring it back into the church.

But they pause at the door. They hold the cloth high. And all the worshippers re-enter the church by passing under the Epitaphios. In a symbolic way they enter the church through the death of Jesus Christ.

It is a visible and visceral reminder of how central the death of Jesus is for Christians. We are brought into salvation, we are made part of the church through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Baptism is a sacramental sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Eucharist is also a regular remembrance of his death and resurrection.

But Holy Week gives us the opportunity every year to focus in again on the centrality of Jesus' death. As we read Luke's Passion today, I invite you to contemplate the depths of God's love for you made knowable through the death of Jesus Christ. His wounds bring us healing. His death brings us life.