Palm Sunday celebrations around the world

Prayers and Processions

Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter, commemorates Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem to celebrate Passover before his death as recounted in the Gospels:

"The very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and strewed them on the road. The crowds preceding him and those following kept crying out and saying: 'Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest'" (Mt 21:8).

By the fourth century, the Church in Jerusalem re-enacted this event with a celebration during which the people sang Hosanna and carried branches to various holy sites. In medieval times, the procession became quite elaborate, starting with a blessing outside the city walls and proceeding to the main church of the city. A flower-festooned crucifix, a statue on wheels or the Blessed Sacrament often represented Jesus. When the crowds reached the gates of the city, a boys' choir would sing the Gloria, Laus et Honor, which is still used in today's liturgies.

Flowers and Figs

Although palm branches are most common, no law specifies what kind of branches must be used. Olive branches are often used and, especially in colder regions, box, yew, spruce and willow branches are common. In parts of England and Poland, the feast is called Willow Sunday for that reason. In Germany, Spain and France, branches interwoven with flowers are tied to the top of long sticks, which has given rise to the name Flower

Sunday. In other areas, the day is known as Fig Sunday since figs are eaten in remembrance of the fig tree that Jesus cursed as he approached Jerusalem.

In the United States, palm branches are blessed before Mass. Sometimes they are blessed outside the church so that a short, symbolic procession back into the sanctuary can take place before the start of Mass. Since the palms we receive are blessed and are sacramentals, they should always be disposed of reverently, either by burning or burial. In most churches, the leftover palms are burned and the ashes used for the next year's Ash Wednesday celebration.

Palms at Home

Place palms in a place of honor in your home. Create a bouquet of palms and pussy willows to use as a centerpiece during Holy Week. Or weaving your palms into crosses and other designs is a traditional way to preserve them. The woven designs can be used as a bookmark in the family Bible, hung above doorways or placed behind a wall cross. Visit Catholic Icing for more ideas and instructions.