**Royal Pain**

Based on [Luke 19:28-40](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk19.28-40)

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Passion (Palm) Sunday

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The Roman Catholics have a new Pope, and he is new. He doesn’t dress in the pompous and circumstantial robes of Benedict and popes before him--he wears plain robes. Still they are robes, still clean robes, still ironed, neat and tidy, but less like a peacock, more like a dove.

You never get a second chance to make a first impression. Not that pope Francis set out to impress, but whilst he made his first journey in the papal motorcade he said he didn’t want his bodyguards around. But they must not be catholic bodyguards, cause they got away with saying “No” to the pope.

Francis has earned the nickname “the unpredictable pope.” He has broken the mould with his informal approach and unscheduled walkabouts. He will conduct this week's ***Maundy Thursday*** service in a prison for young offenders on the outskirts of Rome. **There he is expected to wash and kiss the feet of 12 inmates, in a gesture that commemorates Jesus’ humility towards his disciples before the Last Supper, on the night before he was crucified.** His decision has surprised Vatican officials but is very much in keeping with his past in Argentina, where he washed the feet of Aids sufferers and met with street prostitutes.

If the new Pope keeps this up, he might fit the mould of Jesus and actually earn His title as the “**Vicar of Christ on earth.”** Now, there have been popes that do acts of mercy and love like Jesus, however there’s always a crucial piece missing from their Jesus puzzle. **Popes never die on a cross**; (though that might change for Emeritus Pope Benedict before the press is through with him.) Even so, Popes don’t suffer hell in your place.

In our gospel lesson today, we hear of Jesus’ Triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He rides in as the king of the Jews; but he comes in humility riding a donkey--**no crown, no scepter, no royal robes**. He comes in humble demeanor, but like pope Francis, he’s not shy about it. Jesus probably still does the princess waive. He receives praise. He is not humble in our sense.

We call someone “humble” as a euphemism for their shyness. Jesus was not shy. He was not uncomfortable being a man; he was not embarrassed to be a servant. He isn’t like your mother, who fears having unannounced company lest she be humiliated when others see her messy house. Jesus isn’t like your father, who pontificates the answers to all the world’s problems from his easy-chair; but who’s too shy to speak at social gatherings. **Jesus isn’t like your kids who don’t want to be seen with you in the mall, lest their classmates find out they actually have parents!**

Jesus is at home as a servant; he is comfortable in his humble appearance. He isn’t afraid to appear weak. While his security team worries about crowd control--Jesus suffers the little children to come to him. He rides a *donkey* into Jerusalem with pride. **While other kings take only seats in first-class, Jesus is content to ride coach.** The things that tie us to living in a world of embarrassments, awkwardness, and human weakness are not a hindrance to Jesus. No false modesty, no strained humility---Jesus is king of kings and he know it. He doesn’t shy away from it. He embraces it.

Jesus tells his disciples to go and steal a donkey and bring it to him; though I suppose God has a right to anything he takes. He’s going to ride into Jerusalem parading like a king. **Now I’m sure you’ve been told that Jesus rode a donkey as sign of humility...because any other king would ride on a warhorse and steed.** And I suppose it is. It was almost a scandal when, the day after his election, Pope Francis forsook the popemobile and grabbed an ordinary car to run back to his hotel for something. In our blue collar culture, we love that, the idea of somebody important condescending to live like the rest of us. Custom and tradition be damned, at the end of the day, Jesus puts his pants on one leg at a time just like the rest of us...right?

But Jesus wasn’t so interested in showing off his servant hood...it’s just that he didn’t mind looking weak or being regarded as a servant. Jesus wasn’t as interested in “showing off humility” as he was in fulfilling prophecy. In the book of First Kings (1:33), **King Solomon rode to Gihon for his anointing as king-and he arrived riding his father’s mule.** And Solomon wasn’t showing humility in doing so, for he did not fit the mould of a hobo like Jesus. The point of Jesus riding a donkey is that Jesus is comparing himself to Solomon. Only where Solomon failed his people and brought in idols dividing God’s kingdom, where Solomon failed Jesus will succeed. For as the scriptures say, **”one greater than Solomon has come**.”

In Genesis (49:10-11), Jacob blessed his sons--and said to his son **Judah that the messiah, the “saviour” will come from his lineage.** He said, “**The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him...binding his foal to the vine and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine, and his vesture in the blood of Grapes**!” Whoa! Did you notice the language?..**foal**, **donkey’s colt**; **washing garments in wine**, **the *blood* of Grapes**.

The book of Genesis, written 1500 years before the cross, says the Saviour, will come from the lineage and ancestry of Judah—Jesus’ own lineage. It says, **“a donkey’s colt will be tied to the choice vine; and Jesus says “I am the vine.”** And garments washed in wine called the “**blood of Grapes**”, wine as the blood given for you, **blood of grapes from the “vine” of Jesus.** Forget Nostradamus; forget the Mayan calendar; ...there’s enough prophecy in the bible to satisfy your thirst for mystery. The difference is that these prophesies were fulfilled. The king has already come; the messiah reigns!

It doesn’t matter if the new pope bums around in an ordinary car; or if he breaks security protocol to kiss a baby or two in the crowds. If that’s all he does, then he’s a peacock in his own way too. Washing prisoners feet for the camera...that’s brilliant showmanship for the press. That’s playing the politician’s game. **A pope can ride in the popemobile or on a donkey, and the press can have their fun.** But true humility or servanthood is not found in these gestures. A true imitator of Christ needs to die on the cross of public opinion and shame. The last pope did a good job in going against the grain of the World in what he taught; we have yet to see what Francis will do.

Friends, Jesus humiliation wasn’t in riding a donkey, or bouncing children on his knee. His persecution was his humiliation. He humbled himself when he walked silently to the cross while the world criticized his teaching and mission. He humbled himself when he came asserting his kinghood without resorting to the authority of swords and arrows, but submitting only to the authority of his Father in heaven. **He established his royalty, by suffering royal pain**, for the sake of his subjects. He wore a crown of thorns on his head, a purple robe on his back, a reed scepter in his hand...**and just as willingly as he waived to the crowds from a donkey, he willingly assumed the role of the king of the Jews, putting on the pain and suffering and sin of the world.**

Now ladies and gentlemen, there’s something you need to remember now and especially on Good Friday. Your savior suffered unimaginable pain and it ought to make you tremble; but he didn’t die to gain your sympathy. He didn’t suffer royal pain so you would feel sorry for him; he suffered the hell of your sin ***in your place***.

**When sin entered the world through Adam, the ground was cursed to bring forth thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:18). Now Jesus wears that curse crowned on his head.** The scepter shall not depart from Judah; so Jesus carries a reed scepter, for “**though a bruised reed, he will not break**” (Isaiah 42:3, Matt 12:20). Purple robes are dyed for royalty; Jesus robes are dyed with the blood of grapes from the true vine; wine that we now drink for the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus suffered royal pain for you, He suffered hell and died on behalf of all mankind. Does that mean you will never suffer? no. Does it mean you will not die...of course not. He suffered **hell** instead of you; but he suffered the rejection of the world and died ***ahead of you.* He prepared the royal highway so that the suffering and death you do experience here and now are not a highway to hell, but a stairway to heaven, where you will rest forever in the bosom of His Father and your Father.**

Jesus rode a donkey *on which no one had ever yet sat*, because he is the first to ride to death. In a week’s time, **he will rise from a tomb where no one else had been laid,** because he is the first to rise from the dead, first to be born again of the new creation. His death is a death to sin; His resurrection is a rebirth--preparing us all for a new creation.

Jesus didn’t ride to his death *instead* of us; he rode *ahead* of us. He didn’t rise to new life *instead* of us; he rose *ahead* of us. And now he sits enthroned at the right hand of God, ruling all things, preparing all things so that his kingdom come here, in the hearts and minds and lives of those who have died with Christ in baptism; and raised to new life in him.

As we begin our Holy Week meditations, may we remember that Jesus’ did not die to gain our tears; he died to gain our souls. He is not a Martyr; he’s a Saviour. His death is not a tragedy; it is a victory, a fulfillment of the Father’s providential plan to reconcile all things unto Himself.

*Glory be to Jesus, who in bitter pains, poured for you the lifeblood from his sacred veins.*