

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON (or a hymn) Six days before the Passover, when the Lord came into the city of Jerusalem, the children ran to meet him; in their hands they carried palm branches and with a loud voice cried out: Hosanna in the highest! Blessed are you, who have come in your abundant mercy! O gates, lift high your heads; grow higher, ancient doors. Let him enter, the king of glory! Who is this king of glory? He, the Lord of hosts, he is the king of glory. Hosanna in the highest! Blessed are you, who have come in your abundant mercy!

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 21)

ANTIPHON: My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

RESPONSE: My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

LECTOR: All who see me deride me. They curl their lips, they toss their heads. "He trusted in the Lord, let him save him; let him release him if this is his friend." **R.**

LECTOR: Many dogs have surrounded me, a band of the wicked beset me. They tear holes in my hands and my feet. I can count every one of my bones. **R.**

LECTOR: They divide my clothing among them. They cast lots for my robe. O Lord, do not leave me alone, my strength, make haste to help me! **R.**

LECTOR: I will tell of your name to my brethren and praise you where they are assembled. "You who fear the Lord give him praise; all sons of Jacob, give him glory. Revere him, Israel's sons." **R.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory! Christ became obedient for us even to death, dying on the cross. Therefore God raised him on high and gave him a name above all other names. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory!

COMMUNION ANTIPHON (or a hymn) Father, if this chalice cannot pass without my drinking it, your will be done.

TODAY'S READINGS Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:6-11; Mark 14:1 - 15:47

NEXT WEEK (Easter Sunday) Acts 10:34, 37-43; Psalm 117; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-9

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*A kingdom of
nuisances and
nobodies*



March 24, 2024 Palm Sunday Year B

In 2006, Franciscan theologian Richard Rohr visited Australia and was interviewed on ABC Radio National's "Religion Report". At the time, I was particularly impressed by a point Rohr made in distinguishing between "Christianity" and "Churchianity", where the first constituted a challenge to the prevailing wider societal mores and values, while the second supported the cultural status quo.

Whatever one may think of Rohr's distinction between "Christianity" and "Churchianity", it does open up a fruitful line for discussion of the meaning of Mark's gospel. Written at a time when the Jesus movement was anything but part of the status quo, the gospel is culturally subversive.

The problem that confronted the Markan Christians, as it does us today, is to steer a middle course between the twin tensions of conformity to cultural expectations and the vocation to be counter cultural (where necessary) in working for a better world. Mark's Jesus proclaimed a new world order that would privilege the marginalised and the forgotten; or as Biblical scholars John Dominic Crossan and Tom Wright have variously called, "a kingdom of nuisances and nobodies".

In Mark's gospel, Jesus is a man who haunts the fringes of society, fraternising with the marginalised, touching the untouchables, speaking to those with whom he should not speak and, thereby, breaking the taboos of his Jewish faith and the mores of the Greco-Roman culture.

Positive interactions with Jesus are typically displayed by characters living on society's margins – the "nobodies"; people who were of no

consequence: the leper (1:40-45); the paralytic (2:1-12); the deaf (7:31-37); the blind (8:22-26; 10:46-52); the widow (12:41-44); as well as tax collectors and sinners (2:15).

In his preaching, Jesus repeatedly criticises the abusive use of power by society's wealthy and respectable authorities. And it is this critique of abusive power that eventually ends in Jesus' arrest and execution as a rabble rouser and a criminal of the State.

As Richard Rohr points out, Jesus was not an "insider" or a "company man" (Rohr, 2006); which is not to say that Jesus is an "outsider" per se. Mark's Jesus is a reputable teacher and scholar – a man of some consequence – but he refuses to operate within the boundaries set by either the religious elites or civil authorities, the somebodies of "good society". Indeed, he even refuses to stay dead! Mark's Jesus is not interested in "Churchianity" – that is, sticking to rules that govern membership in the club or the "ekklesia" (assembly or church). He is a social reformer who seeks the company of those deemed to be "beyond the pale"; an agent of God who proclaims, not a kingdom of the wealthy and notable – the "somebodies" in society – but that of the poor, the forgotten, the "nuisances and nobodies" – and he calls his disciples to go to the margins and do the same.

The final command in Mark's gospel is the call to "return to Galilee" (16:7), to the dirt-poor farmers and fishers at the rural fringes of Roman Palestine.

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