

Recently I learned that some scholars think that there were two processions on Palm Sunday. One was Jesus and his disciples coming in from one side of the city. The other was Pilate, the Roman Governor, in a military parade, arriving on this highest festival of the Jewish nation to assert his authority.

Both Jesus and Pilate arrived and wanted people to know who they were, and how powerful they were.

Mahatma Gandhi was once asked why he always travelled 3rd Class on the railways. He answered, "Because there is no 4th Class."

Why did Jesus chose a small donkey to enter the City? Because there was nothing less cool available to him.

What did Pilate ride? A war horse. Flanked by mounted soldiers, preceded by uniformed troops on foot with banners and lances and swords and gleaming armour. Rome in all its fearsome might. Rome the storied city of magnificence, wealth and cruelty across the wide sea. Rome the conqueror of the known world, before whom all kings had bowed or been destroyed. Rome symbolized by Pilate, the Emperor's man, like a god in their midst.

So it is with intent that Jesus chose to mirror Pilate. Like a still lake mirrors the mountains, but turns them into valleys, Jesus inverts everything about Pilate.

Yet we love what Pilate stands for. We love our military history and our governments' commitments to military spending. We love our politicians to be men and women of power, hard leaders in tough times. We love the heroes in movies who win the fights, wield the weaponry, and blast the bad guy to bits in the final climax of explosions. That's us! It is part of our human nature!

But Jesus models something else. Hard way to live. A narrow path to follow. It is the way of littleness. A way of forgiving before judging. Of reconciling rather than dividing into goodies and baddies. Of making yourself into the servant rather than wondering why you don't have more servants working for you.

Jesus models inaction. He did nothing when he arrived in the Temple, surrounded by adoring crowds.

Jesus models waiting, praying, being faithful and facing the worst rather than running from it.

Now it would be easy to think that this is Jesus saying to us, "So you, go and do likewise! Go and lose all your money, become un-powerful and get yourself killed!" But this is not it.

Deeper is the truth of the teaching of Palm Sunday and Holy Week. The comparison Jesus and Pilate make are of motivation and values. Both of them are trying to be true to themselves and their mission. Jesus, meeting Pilate, never even hints at a

negative judgment of him. They meet and Pilate cannot comprehend Jesus, but feels a love towards him. He tries to get him free.

There it is! The drive behind Pilate's vision of the meaning of life is about power and being in control. His work is to maintain control and obedience. He keeps people working inside his set of rules. He assess his success by how he is rewarded by the Emperor, the cowering of the crowds and the wealth he amasses.

The drive behind Jesus is about setting people free, giving away life in abundance and releasing people from prisons of guilt and fear. His work is to restore people to what God made them to be. He invites people to step out of their old ways of being and begin a new way of life. That way of life is measured by love and risk, by trust in others and in God, by peace of heart and joy in the soul. It is lived day by day, and rewarded in the moment.

Who's parade would you have gone to see? The scruffy preacher on a donkey, the one with the nice smile? The magnificent glitter and glory and might, and a chance to glimpse the Roman Governor who this week will let a condemned man live!

Who do you have as heroes today? Are they more like Pilate or like Jesus?
When you assess your own life, what are the values you apply to see if you did well enough?
When you look at someone you know who did poorly do you feel pain for them or relief that it wasn't you?

I ask this of you, and of myself. The path of selfless love and of putting absolutely everyone first ahead of your self is a hard one to follow. But here, in Holy Week, it is right in your face. Jesus chooses love over power, faith over security and truth over success. He chooses to walk with God and let no other demand alter his course. And by so doing, he found, and can show us, the path to eternal life.

In this week let us come and walk with Jesus and pray for his grace to follow in his values.