

Palm Sunday 2023
I Am Jesus' Little Donkey

AND JESUS FOUND A YOUNG DONKEY AND SAT ON IT, JUST AS IT IS WRITTEN, "FEAR NOT, DAUGHTER OF ZION; BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING, SITTING ON A DONKEY'S COLT!"

I am Jesus' little donkey... No, it just doesn't quite have the same ring as *I am Jesus' Little Lamb*. Yet, I would like each of you to consider yourself not only as Jesus' little lamb, but as Jesus' little donkey. Next to the lamb, the donkey is the most honored animal in all of Scripture. In the book of Exodus, God commands that every firstborn animal be offered to the Lord as a sacrifice; excluding the donkey, commanding that every firstborn donkey be redeemed with a lamb (Ex 13:13). God granted no animal on earth the gift of speech except Balaam's donkey (cf. Nu 22). In Judges 15, Samson killed one thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey. Afterward, Samson dying of thirst, cries out to the Lord, who then causes water to gush out of the jawbone, quenching Samson's strength and reviving him. Consider that for a moment: Samson's donkey bone both killed and refreshed.

Although Scripture does not explicitly tell us, it is quite probable that the mother of our Lord rode into Bethlehem on a donkey while baby Jesus was in her womb. Likewise, a donkey probably carried Mary and the Christ-child on their flight to Egypt. On Palm Sunday, as foretold by the prophet Zechariah, our Lord Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a little donkey, a colt of its mother, upon which no one had yet ridden. This lowly donkey carried our Lord and King into Jerusalem, where he would be beaten, crucified, die and be buried, before rising from the dead.

So significantly does Scripture honor donkeys, that we consider this Palm Sunday how each of us can be Christ's donkey. On Palm Sunday we

are used to remembering the crowds waving the palm branches and singing, “Hosanna!” Yet today, we remember the humble, honorable donkey to ask: What does it mean to be Jesus’ donkey?

First, it means to be **humble**. The prophet told the daughters of Jerusalem to rejoice that their King was coming to them **humble** and riding on a donkey. A donkey is a lowly animal. Jesus entering Jerusalem, in humility, reminds us of how He is with us today. Water is such a simple thing that we let run down the drain. Bread and wine make for quite a simple meal. Yet, our Lord comes to us by such lowly means. The Sacrament we prize is despised by the world in the same way the religious and political elites sneered at Jesus entering the city on a donkey. Yet, we Christians know that beneath those forms of bread and wine are the true body and blood of Jesus, given and shed for you.

And so, we Christians come in humility to eat and drink this meal, trusting that it provides what our dear Lord promises: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. This humility leads us to treat our neighbors with kindness and love, to be quick to forgive, slow to anger, ready to help, considering others more significant than ourselves.

Second, to be Jesus’ donkey means to be **faithful**. When Balaam’s donkey rebuked him, she said, “Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Is it my habit to treat **you** this way?” Although it is surprising that a donkey would speak, it is not surprising that a donkey would say that. Donkeys are faithful. They just do their work. They follow him who leads them. That’s what the donkey, who carried our Lord on its back, did. He followed the direction of the disciples and did not begrudge the load. And so, to be Jesus’ donkey means to follow him,

much as a little lamb follows its shepherd. Yet more, to carry the load He gives without complaint.

And this leads us to the third meaning of being Jesus' donkey, **to be willing to bear a burden**. The hymnwriter of old said it so well, "I leave all things to God's direction...What pleases God, that pleases me" {LSB 719}. That is the attitude of Jesus' donkeys. They're beasts of burden, who do not complain about the load. They also do not choose their load. Rather, he carries what the master places on him, without complaint. And so too, you do not choose which cross your Savior lays on you for your good, but you bear it with patience.

Of course, the most precious load each of Jesus' donkeys must carry is Christ Jesus himself. You've most likely heard the lie of the devil, "You shouldn't wear your religion on your sleeve." I've even heard Christians say such things. It's total nonsense. What does Jesus say? "Everyone who confesses me before men, I too will confess before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I too will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 10:32-33). To carry Christ means to confess Jesus at every opportunity, as St. Peter says, "Always be prepared to give a defense to anyone for the reason for the hope that is within you" (1 Pe 3:15). Jesus' donkeys confess Christ to family, friends, and acquaintances. They aren't embarrassed nor ashamed to be known as Christians. And they teach their children about Jesus at home and they take them to church.

Yet, a donkey is not thought wise, in the eyes of the world. Just as the world hated Christ, it will most certainly hate all who confess His holy name.

And this can be the hardest load to bear of all. When people go after Christ, they go after His donkey. And with that comes a great temptation for us little donkeys: A horse can tire of his rider and try to buck its rider off its back. So too, we can be tempted to get Christ off our back, to escape the abuse of the world.

When you are mocked and ridiculed by your co-workers and fellow students because of your confession of Christ, it is tempting to remove Christ from your back. When you become an outsider in your own family, because of your Christian beliefs that they don't like, it becomes tempting to deny Christ. When Jesus becomes a heavy burden to bear, the temptation is to remain silent.

Yet, when these temptations arise, do not put Christ down. Do not **silence** your confession of faith. Remember the words of Jesus. "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and learn from me, for I'm gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*" (Mt 11:28-29).

How can Jesus say that his yoke is easy and his burden is light, if it seems that Jesus' little donkeys must bear the weight of the whole world on account of Him? Because Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. It is impossible for you to carry a greater burden than what Jesus bore for you. To be Jesus' donkey does not mean to bear the weight of your own sin; but rather, to confess Him who takes your sins away. This is why Jesus' donkeys gladly bear their load. They are carrying Him who has won their salvation for them.

And we take comfort in His promise that He exalts the humble. Yes, Jesus came in humility to bear our sins for us. Yet, Jesus does not remain

in His humility. He rises from the dead on the third day. He ascends to the right hand of God the Father, with the sure and certain promise that we will rise to eternal life in Him. He who carries Christ in humility, will be raised with Christ in his exaltation.

That lowly colt of a donkey carried Jesus to Jerusalem, where he was falsely accused, beaten, spit upon, mocked, crucified, and buried. He did this to save us from our sins. And so, being Jesus' donkey today, you continue to carry Christ, so that you may confess His crucifixion again and again. You confess that He has made full atonement. You are not ashamed of Him, who took away the sin of the world. And with such a confession, you know that Christ is not ashamed of you. That little donkey carried Jesus into Jerusalem, so that He would win victory over sin, death, and hell for us. And so, as Jesus little donkey, you confess His victory for you.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.