

Skipping to the Happy Ending

When it comes to books and movies, I'm all about the happy ending. Real life doesn't always deliver, but I figure fiction should. My sister is even more zealous about that policy. You've probably seen the wonderful classic movie *The Sound of Music*, which ends with the whole Von Trapp family escaping the Nazis, over the mountains to freedom and a new life. That's not good enough for my sister, though. She prefers to stop the video just after the wedding, skipping all the unpleasantness that follows and forgetting the horrid Nazis altogether.

It's tempting to apply the same philosophy to Holy Week, which starts today with Palm Sunday. How about stopping the movie after Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem? Quit while everybody's cheering and Jesus is on top.

When they brought the colt to Jesus... he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches... Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!.. Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11:7-10)

That would make a great ending, right? Just stop there and avoid all the unpleasantness that follows. Nobody really wants to see Jesus being arrested, beaten, and crucified after all. Not the crowds who cheered him that first Palm Sunday. Certainly not the disciples who loved and followed him. Not even Satan wanted Jesus crucified! Hmm. Therein lies the problem. More than once, Satan attempted to sidetrack Jesus from His mission (Mt. 4:1-11). He knew that if he could just make Jesus forget about dealing with the ugly sin issue, to skip all the inevitable "unpleasantness" that entailed, he (Satan) would win. As for us? We would all be hopelessly lost, falling into his greedy clutches.

But instead of taking the easy way out, Jesus voluntarily chose to do the hard but necessary thing to save us. He chose to go the way of the cross. That's why we don't quit at the partial triumph of Palm Sunday. That's why we can't just skip over Jesus' crucifixion to the greater victory of His resurrection on Easter morning either – at least we ought not. Don't avert your eyes; face the ugliness of sin and what it cost Jesus. Only then can we rightly appreciate what He achieved for us: the most glorious happy ending ever – eternity in heaven. Because Jesus didn't skip Good Friday, neither should we.

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." (Mt. 16:24)

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