

**J.D. Ousley**  
**Homily—14Apr19**  
**Palm Sunday**  
**“Sign of Conquest”**

*In the Name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Amen.*

There are two references to “darkness” in the long Gospel lesson that we are about to read together.

In the first reference, Jesus confronts the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come to get him. He says, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!"

Then, toward the end of the reading, during the time when Jesus is hanging on the Cross, the text says that “darkness came over the whole land.” So the spiritual power of darkness brought by Christ’s enemies displays itself when Jesus is arrested and when he is dying.

In fact, though, this whole long lesson is about darkness. The unjust judges pronounce an unjust verdict. Pilate then condemns the innocent man to death.

The soldiers arrest Jesus and then, a few hours later, they carry out the death sentence. The crowd that witnesses Christ’s trial encourages Pilate with its shout of “Crucify him!” The future looks bleak.

And as we contemplate the bloodthirsty behavior of those around Jesus, let us admit that darkness can also be found lurking in our own souls. We’re not immune from judgmental thoughts and fantasies of vengeance.

Yet all is not lost. The power of darkness is only temporary. There is an old Latin saying that Christians have sometimes adopted as their motto. The saying can be translated as, “In this sign you will conquer.” The “sign” that the saying refers to is the Cross.

The motto comes from a story that ancient historians told about the Roman Emperor Constantine. Constantine was marching with his army when he looked up to the sun and saw a cross of light above it, and with the cross, the words, "in this sign, you will conquer".

Constantine’s vision changed the course of history. The Emperor’s conversion to Christianity led to an end to the persecution of the Church. That was followed by a rapid increase in converts throughout the Roman Empire.

“In this sign, you will conquer.” As we commit ourselves to living under the sign of the Cross, we can be victorious over the forces of darkness.

The evil powers of this world don’t have ultimate authority. Nor will the gloom in our hearts ultimately win out. It is Christ who will conquer.

Of course, Palm Sunday isn’t the time to celebrate what is really the joy of Easter. Although we began this service with the hosannas of the triumphant entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, today’s worship ends with the lights out and a silent procession out of the church.

Yet while we must recognize the arrest and the trial and the crucifixion of Christ that Holy Week marks, we also recognize that this is not just the story of the end of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. It is also the story of the beginning of the new life that will be offered on Easter morning.

Remember that. Remember that whatever the shadows in your own life, the Cross of Jesus Christ will sustain you. Under that holy sign, you will conquer.

*Amen.*