

Palm Sunday, 2025—

Blessed. We have just been blessed to listen to...The Greatest Story Ever Told. That title—The Greatest Story Ever Told—has become synonymous with the title we just heard proclaimed...The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. I love the sound and flow and meaning of The Greatest Story Ever Told. And The Passion of Our Lord IS the greatest story ever told. Bar none...right? There is nothing...nothing even close.

And we hear that greatest story every Palm Sunday—and we will hear it again on Good Friday. And every time we hear it, it can go deeper into us—into our very souls—Jesus' monumental suffering—his immeasurable love—and we note that suffering and love—that greatest story—has been proclaimed from pulpits around the world for thousands of years.

The story speaks for itself. But I would like to share something related to the Gospel that we just heard proclaimed in our narthex.

That Gospel is the source for a vital and essential part of this weekend. In fact, it is the part that gives this Sunday its name.

Last week, I stopped into this great coffeehouse near my home. There was no one in the order area, so I went right up and ordered some coffee, and as the barista carried the coffee cup to the counter, she dropped the cup. Instantly, I rushed around the counter, and she kindly refused my help, but I insisted. And soon I was kneeling on the floor with a rag, wiping up coffee.

As I was finishing, I glanced up at the cash register station. There was a rosary hanging on a wooden panel square just to the right of the register. Up on the right side of the square, I saw some postcards and photos. And down below—tucked in among all that—I could see a small, folded cross. I asked the barista if I could check it out. It turned out to be a cross made of palm leaves. I learned it was a remnant from Palm Sunday 2024.

You know, you find such remnants in the most unlikely places.

But that was a sign to me—a sign, I think, of the deep attachment we have to our Palm Sunday palms. Many people save their palms. Some people fold them into meaningful shapes. They even decorate their homes with them—and sometimes their coffeehouses.

When I was growing up, my parents kept their palms. My mother put hers behind a Sacred Heart image my parents had in their bedroom. My aunt kept hers behind her bathroom mirror.

Recently, I was in a taxi. The cabbie had tucked a palm spear into the visor of his cab.

But we should not think of these palms as just one more “Catholic thing” hanging on a wall or tucked behind a holy picture. Our palms tell another part of the story that we just read. And it is our story—yours and mine.

More than five weeks ago, many of us stood in this church and received ashes. We were reminded of our mortality, our sinfulness, our need for penance and prayer.

But those ashes were not just scraped together from the bottom of somebody’s fireplace. They were the remnants of burned palms from the year before.

Today, we are here in this holy place again and five weeks older, and, hopefully, five weeks wiser and holier. And we have near us our brand-new palms, symbols of new growth.

And they beg the questions: How have I grown since Ash Wednesday? What have I learned? How have I changed?

And what will I do with the promise—the potential—of these palms that I will bring home today?

Our hope and our prayer are that we have been renewed during these weeks of Lent. And, just maybe, these palm leaves will serve to remind us of that.

Clearly, Lent is bracketed—it is bookended—by palms—the loss and the destruction of them at the beginning—and, at the end, green new leaves—a restoration of life.

Ultimately, that is what our Lenten weeks have been about—burning away—clearing out—cultivating something new.

So, I urge you. When you bring your palms home today, let them be an inspiration for your upcoming week—the week that is the holiest one of the year.

But don't stop there. Don't just tuck them behind a holy picture and come to take them for granted. Let them also serve as a challenge for you.

And what is the challenge? It is to remember—to remember the triumph of Jesus' ride into Jerusalem—to remind ourselves of his suffering and his death—and to remember that he did all that for you and for me.

As we may have heard on Ash Wednesday five weeks ago: Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return. We eventually wiped or washed away those ashes. But these palms we have today will stay with us for a while.

They will provide silent testimony, they will bear witness, they will call on us not to forget what we are—mortal beings, but destined for eternal life and happiness. That sums up what our Lenten pilgrimage has been about.

So, what is my personal prayer this Palm Sunday? It is that we carry that eternal destiny idea with us—just as we carry these palms—because in a sense, each of us this day holds our future in our hands. And what will we do with our palms? What will we do with our lives?

Plz give it some thought....