There were moments in the history of the Church when the liturgy was not simply "something that was done," but something that was **deeply lived—with the body, with time, and with the whole soul**. Palm Sunday is one of those cases.

Today, in many parishes, the celebration may last an hour… perhaps a little more. But there was a time—not so long ago—when this day could extend for hours, becoming a true **total spiritual experience**, profoundly pedagogical and transformative.

What have we lost? And above all, what can we recover?

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1. The original meaning: entering with Christ into Jerusalem… and into His Passion

Palm Sunday is not just any feast. It marks the beginning of Holy Week, the moment when the Church enters into the heart of the Christian mystery: the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ.

This day commemorates Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, acclaimed by the crowd with palms and branches. But here lies a deeply theological paradox:

- The people cry out: **"Hosanna!"**
- Days later, they will cry: **"Crucify Him!"**

The liturgy of Palm Sunday is precisely designed to draw us into this tension. It is not merely remembrance—it is **participation**.

> ***"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"*** *(Mt 21:9)*

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2. When the liturgy was a journey (literally)

In the ancient tradition—especially inspired by Jerusalem—Palm Sunday did not begin inside the church, but **outside**.

From testimonies such as that of the pilgrim Egeria (4th century), we know that the faithful:

- Gathered in a place different from the church
- Heard the Gospel of the entry into Jerusalem
- Walked in procession, holding branches
- Sang psalms and hymns
- Entered solemnly into the city or the church

This tradition was later adopted and transformed by the Latin Church over the centuries, becoming part of the Roman liturgy.

How long did it last?

It was not unusual for the celebration to include:

- Long processions
- Full chanting of psalms
- Extended readings
- Deep preaching
- The Passion chanted in its entirety

The result: **several hours of living liturgy**.

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3. The traditional structure: a catechesis in motion

The richness of this liturgy was not accidental. Every element had meaning:

1. Blessing of the palms

This was not a quick gesture. It was solemn, with prayers recalling the victory of Christ the King.

2. Procession

Not decorative, but deeply theological:

- It represented following Christ

- It symbolized the soul's entry into the Paschal mystery
- It was a public act of faith

3. Chant of the *Gloria Laus*

An ancient hymn proclaiming the kingship of Christ.

4. Entrance into the church

Not merely physical—it symbolized entering into the mystery of Redemption.

5. Proclamation of the Passion

One of the most powerful moments. It was not simply "read"—it was **solemnly proclaimed or chanted**, often with multiple voices.

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4. Why did it last so long? (and why that was good)

Today we are used to speed. But traditional liturgy followed a different logic:

Time as an offering

Time was not "wasted"—it was **given to God**.

Deep catechesis

Every gesture taught something. The liturgy was the first school of theology.

❤ Total involvement

You were not a spectator. You were part of the event.

Real preparation for Holy Week

You did not enter the Passion superficially. You were immersed in it.

5. What we have lost… and why it matters

With the liturgical reforms of the 20th century, many rites were simplified. This brought pastoral benefits (greater accessibility), but also consequences:

What has weakened:

- The sense of the sacred as something “great”
- Spiritual patience
- The sacrificial dimension of time
- The experience of community in movement

Today, many Palm Sunday celebrations can feel like:

- A beautiful gesture (the branches)
- A slightly longer Mass
- A cultural tradition

But we risk losing the essential: **an existential entry into the Passion of Christ**.

6. The great theological lesson: Christ the King… who goes to die

Palm Sunday is profoundly paradoxical:

- Christ enters as King…
- …but toward the Cross

This reveals a central truth of Christianity:

 Glory passes through the Cross

There is no Christianity without this tension.

Saint Augustine expressed it this way: *“Christ reigns from the wood.”*

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7. Practical application: how can we live a deeper Palm Sunday today?

We cannot simply return to the past. But we can **recover the spirit**.

Here is a concrete guide:

1. Arrive early… and prepare yourself

Do not rush in. This day marks the beginning of the most important time of the year.

2. Live the procession with intention

It is not just a symbolic gesture. It is your “yes” to Christ.

Ask yourself:

> *Am I willing to follow Him… even to the Cross?*

3. Listen to the Passion as if for the first time

Do not just “endure” it. Meditate on it.

Place yourself within the scene:

- Am I Peter?
- Am I Pilate?
- Am I the crowd?

4. Bring the sign into your home

Blessed palms are not decoration. They are a sacramental reminding you that Christ is King in your home.

5. Give real time to God

Recover something we have lost: **free time for God**.

Even if the liturgy is not hours long… you can extend it yourself.

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8. An urgent call for our time

We live in a culture of immediacy, superficiality, and speed.

But the Christian faith cannot be lived that way.

The traditional Palm Sunday reminds us of something essential:

God is not experienced in haste

Long liturgy was not an excess. It was a pedagogy:

- To learn how to love
- To learn how to wait
- To learn how to suffer with meaning

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9. Conclusion: this is not about nostalgia, but depth

This is not about idealizing the past.

It is about rediscovering something still necessary today:

A faith that involves time, body, community, and heart

Palm Sunday is not just the beginning of Holy Week.

It is a direct question to your life:

> *Do you acclaim Christ only when everything goes well…*
> *or are you willing to follow Him also to the Cross?*

Because there—and only there—the true Christian life begins.