NOTE: This homily is intended to be given at the beginning of Mass, after the reading of the Gospel and before the blessing of palms.

It must have seemed to the apostles and the other disciples of Jesus that their Master was undergoing a great triumph; large crowds of people were welcoming Him as He entered Jerusalem, singing hosannas and praising Him as a great prophet sent by God. The Lord seemed to be very popular and welcome, and His followers were no doubt delighted and caught up in all the excitement—so much so that they could hardly be expected to imagine the terrible events that would happen less than a week later, even though Jesus had warned them on several occasions of what was to come. The apostles were rejoicing—but that was soon to change. On Good Friday everything would turn upside down; it would seem all Jerusalem was demanding Christ’s death, and as this harsh decree was being implemented, the apostles—except for John—had fled in fear and shame and dismay.

In a similar way, five weeks ago we began this Lenten season in the traditional manner, with the distribution of ashes; here in the parish we also had Friday fish fries and Stations of the Cross, school penance services and Confessions and other Lenten practices, while looking forward to and planning for all the wonderful and moving events of Holy Week and Easter. Everything, we thought, would be just as it always was, spiritually comfortable and predictable and enjoyable—except we now experience a very different reality, one which would have been unimaginable less than two months ago, one which evokes fear and confusion and distress throughout our country and most of the world.

However, just as the agony and shame and defeat of Good Friday was followed by the joy and glory and triumph of Easter Sunday, so it is possible for our world and our lives to be renewed and restored—especially if we as a nation, and we as individual believers, humble ourselves and turn back to the Lord. God is able to make everything work for the good of those to turn to Him in faith; the only limit on His power is how much we are willing to trust in Him, and the degree to which we surrender ourselves to Him. Everything that happens, no matter how inconvenient or painful or upsetting, can help us grow in grace and make us more ready for eternal life—and, of course, that’s the only thing that matters in the end.

For better or for worse, today’s celebration of Palm Sunday truly is unique, and we are entering into an observance of Holy Week and Easter unlike any other we’ve ever experienced or imagined. This is not likely something any of us would have chosen, but through faith, we know the Lord’s grace can be found in every event and situation. As long as we’re willing to place ourselves into God’s hands, our religious observances and expressions of faith this week truly can be wonderfully and uniquely blessed.