

The year 313 A.D. is a watershed year in the history of Christianity. It was the year of the Edict of Milan, when Constantine the Great permitted the followers of Christ for the first time to worship in public. His father, who preceded him as emperor, was a pagan. His name as Constantius. When Constantius ascended the throne he discovered that many Christians actually held important jobs in the government and in the court. He put out an order to all these Christians; and the order was: “Give up Christ, or give up your job.” The great majority gave up their jobs rather than give up Christ. A few gave up their religion, rather than lose their jobs.

Then the emperor turned around and gave their jobs back to those who had been faithful to Christ; and he dismissed the others, saying to them: “If you will not be true to Christ, you will not be true to me.”

In today’s processional gospel, the crowds ushered Jesus into Jerusalem by spreading their cloaks on the road, and by shouting out all the while: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.” . . . I have often wondered how many of these same individuals, just several days later, were part of the crowd that went out to the Mount of Olives, lead by Judas, to arrest Jesus. I wonder how many were part of the crowd that hauled Jesus before the high priest, and before the Sanhedrin, and before Pilate. And how many do you think shouted out: “Crucify him! Crucify him!” How many jeered at him as he hung upon the cross?

We who gather here today: what, exactly, is the level of our fidelity to Jesus?

- Do we claim Jesus as our king today, as we enter this holiest week of the year?
- Will we join Jesus at the Table of the Last Supper on Thursday, as he gives us the one and only food that nourishes our souls?
- Will we be with him on Friday, as his bloodied body is nailed to the cross, to die – not for himself – but for you and for me, making it possible for us to live forever?

The simple truth is that if we are not with Jesus at the Last Supper, and if we are not with Jesus at the cross, how can we expect to be with Jesus at the Resurrection?