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[PASSION PREFACE]

Today's a day for practical jokes, to 1<sup>st</sup> April, April Fool. But this time and place is hardly a suitable one for that, I suppose: though it may be no harm to say that there's a place for fun and laughter, and for joking, in religion too. In one sense, it's the appreciation of the ridiculous that keeps us humble before God and ready to give Him praise and thanks, with joy, for the creation He's made and put us in to. And maybe it might be, in the end, the religious sense that alone will keep people sane and laughing in a world that grows too serious, takes itself too seriously, and treats fun and laughter as something dangerous even treasonable — even now <sup>there are countries and places</sup> [in the many totalitarian states of wretched hue] <sup>where</sup> humour is a dangerous thing to indulge in, laughter can land you in trouble, if self-important men and parties and systems think they're being laughed at. But really, there is a lot to laugh at, that can be made gentle fun of, in the world around us: only, <sup>5 times</sup> the same things would also make you want to cry, in frustration and anger, to cry out against stupidity, cruelty, injustice and tragedy. And there are so many sad and serious people for whom life is no joy, maybe because they've forgotten about God, or choose to ignore Him. Either way, we make ourselves just more ridiculous — and more dangerous and destructive if we also try to 'play God' with others, as indeed often happens. So, in God's family, and in His company, let's rejoice in a little bit of foolishness for a day — that's a prayer too, acknowledging God for who He is, and ourselves for what and who we are. There've always been saints and holy people who've been very foolish, as the world looks at things, who've made fools of themselves

because they're in love with God. And that brings me back to the April Fool — you could say that Christ is the April Fool: St Paul after all said much the same thing when he said that for the Greeks the Cross of Christ was foolishness, folly. And he lined himself up firmly with that folly, willing to be thought a fool for Christ's sake. Many many people still think of Christ's death on the cross as a stupid and foolish thing, and of Christians as being fools to follow Him and His way. It's this foolishness, this stumbling-block in the way of people's understanding and acceptance of God that's put before our particular attention at this time of the year, in the celebration of Holy Week and Easter. The Cross, which is a contradiction: the figure of Christ on it, God suffering and dying in man. Who can understand it? Why did it have to happen that way? These are questions for our prayer these days, and some answers only begin to come with the resurrection of Christ — itself a foolish thing to believe in, to the eyes of the 'sensible' world around us. Yet, this is the core of our Christian faith and practice, that Jesus suffered, died, was buried, rose from dead, returned to the Father, sends His Spirit to be with us, leading us into truth-life. This we celebrate especially next week, and it's a "foolishness" that turns the wisdom of the world upside down, that challenges how we understand ourselves, our world and our place in it, that shows how love-breaks in, God's love, to rescue us from our self-righteous seriousness and the evil and sin that's led to and which we find we can't control. Think about it, as we listen to this song for today.

Pueri Helraam  
#17  
3:52  
from the Palm Sunday liturgy:  
Psalterium's "In propeum expectant"  
"My least expected  
blame = mischief"  
MUSIC - PRAYERS

Sunday is Palm Sunday, and there is a ceremony of blessing tree-branches, and then carrying them around — a rather rather silly thing to be doing, people might think. But of course we do it to recall and to celebrate the entry of Christ into Jerusalem just before His passion. And that was a joyous occasion, according to the gospel accounts, when Jesus was welcomed with enthusiasm and excitement, when people sang in the streets in greeting and praise to God, throwing their cloaks on the road and cutting down green branches to make a triumphal way for the Lord. Maybe that looked silly too; and if you tried it today there'd no doubt be complaints from tree-lovers and conservationists at the least. The point is, though, that people do do those kinds of things in excitement and rejoicing: and people in love are notoriously silly & foolish in some of the things they do..... at least, they seem so to the more serious and sober-minded who aren't sharing their feelings. Holy Week and Easter is a special time, of invitation to share with Christ His feelings, His sorrow & suffering, His dying and returning to be with those He loves. It isn't just history, something that once happened a long time ago, but for now, this year too. May our prayer, reflection and celebration these days bring us close to the heart of Jesus and to each other in His love and security of each of us. And if in doing so, we seem foolish and silly to others, what matter? ... it's only part of the folly of the Cross we wish to share with Christ  
 Our Lord & Saviour