

## Palm Sunday 2026

**Matt 21:1-11; Isaiah 50: 4-7; Ps 21; Phil 2:6-11; Matt 26:14 – 27:66**

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It was announced by the Vatican this past Wednesday - The Solemnity of the Annunciation – that Archbishop Fulton Sheen is going to be beatified in St. Louis Missouri, on Sept. 24 of this year. Such is the anticipated popularity of the event that the celebratory Mass is going to be held at 'The Dome at America's Center', a stadium in St. Louis: it has the seating capacity of just over 82,000 souls.

This tickles my sense of humour a little. I have been reading some of Fulton Sheen's writings. He does not hold much for crowds of people. He loves people, and he loves people who are in a crowd, but he does not hold much for people who have lost their identity to belong to the crowd. For him Christians are those who are willing to walk against the crowd, not just to be different, but to be followers of Christ. A Christian would much rather that people walked with them, because that would be good for them. But a Christian won't take his or her sense of direction from the crowd. Sometimes a Christian has to go it alone.

Today, being Palm Sunday, is such a day. Jesus is taking his donkey ride up to Jerusalem, and the crowd is walking with him. If you were just observing you might think that the crowd was carrying him towards his object, like a wave carrying a surf-boarder up on its powerful shoulders.

The crowd cries out, '*Hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*'. Some onlookers ask, '*Who is this?*' The crowd responds '*This is the prophet Jesus.*' The crowd is wrong. They think he is a prophet, a man: He knows he is God. They think that Jesus is going to take his rightful place in Jerusalem, as the Messiah, probably to be their king. Jesus appears to be going in that same direction. The crowd thinks He is fulfilling their will. But, He most decidedly is not. He is cutting his own, ever so lonely path to the Cross. He is fulfilling His Father's will. As the story progresses, only a few will remain at the foot of the cross, others will be gathered again, but many simply desert the Son of God and go home forever.

Fulton Sheen is right; the followers of God have usually been outnumbered by the those who fall by the wayside. Of those who Moses leads out of Egypt a whole generation dies because they are faithless. Of the 12 spies who go into the promised land, only Caleb and Joshua are faithful to God. Gideon's army of 32,000 goes out to do battle with the Midianite army of 135,000. Too many, too many cowards, to many insufficiently devoted. Gideon has to reduce his army to a mere 300 stalwart hearts to defeat the Midianites. Jesus says this himself, on a number of occasions: in the parable of the sower in Matthew's Gospel<sup>1</sup>, in the warning that few will enter by the narrow path, and when he teaches on that he is the Bread of Life in John's Gospel.<sup>2</sup> It is too much of a strain. Many leave. And us? Sheen says, '*God is*

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 13

<sup>2</sup> John 6

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*thinning our ranks, and we are preparing for a stronger and more holy Church.*<sup>3</sup> I see it is self-evident.

People often ask, *'Why did so many not come back to Church after COVID?'* I think the answer is self-evident. People ask, *'How did, and do, such bad things happen in the Church?'* I think the answer is self-evident. People ask, *'Why are there so few vocations? Should we broaden the type of people permitted into Ordained ministry? Should we change teachings of morality, on sex and marriage?'* Even here, I think the answers readily present themselves. Again, in the words of Fulton Sheen: *'God does not expressly say to the Church, "Tell your cowards to leave." They just leave... In a crisis the Lord wants only the true, the faithful and the strong*<sup>4</sup> in their love of Christ.

This is the road to Jerusalem: do we follow the crowd, or do we follow Christ? The destination is not the same. If you find that you predominantly turn to the world outside for its answers to the Church's many and seemingly intractable problems, then you have your destination. If you yearn for the only solution that the Church has to the Church's problems, which is holiness, then you also have your destination. To follow Christ is to follow the way of the Cross, to draw near to him when he is alone on the hill. We do not need to cheer Him on, we need only do what he asks of us.

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<sup>3</sup> Sheen, Fulton, *On the Demonic*, ( Emmaus Road Publishing, Ohio, 2024) p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* 47