

Palm Sunday Pilgrim Guide

Why do we walk on Palm Sunday? It's not about walking to church for the sake of walking. It's about tapping what Jesus experienced as he walked to Jerusalem.

This guide is meant to help you make the most of your walk. On your journey, pause five times to read and respond as outlined below – when you start, at the FOF cross and baptism font just at the finish, and three times of your choosing along the way. If you're traveling solo, read and reflect to yourself. If traveling as a group, select someone in your party to lead each section.

At the beginning of your walk

Reflect: God commanded the Israelites to take a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year (Deut 16:16). Palm Sunday is one of these pilgrim days. Some walked hundreds of miles to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. Walking wasn't just a means of travel. It was a time of intense devotion. It is a physical journey with a spiritual goal.

Pray: What are you anticipating? What are you concerned about? What possible obstacles stand before you? Give them to God right now. "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I start my journey in your name. Guide me in your path."

Psalm of Ascent: "Praise the LORD. Praise, O servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD. Let the name of the LORD be praised, both now and forevermore. From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the LORD is to be praised" (Ps 113:1-3).

First midway pause

Reflect: Think of Passover like the Fourth of July. Jews celebrated how God freed them from Egypt, and asked God to free them still. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the city was charged. The atmosphere electric. Revolution was in the air. The pilgrimage was a way to be a part of it. It is precisely because we do not typically walk that makes it a special gesture. A pilgrimage is doing something different for the glory of God.

Pray: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!"

Psalm of Ascent: "When Israel came out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of foreign tongue, Judah became God's sanctuary, Israel his dominion. The sea looked and fled, the Jordan turned back; the mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs. Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turned the rock into a pool, the hard rock into springs of water" (Ps 114:1-8).

Second midway pause

Reflect: For safety and company people would often band together on pilgrimages. As they traveled, they would pray and sing songs. Psalms 113-136 are called Psalms of Ascent because Israelites would sing them while “going up” to Jerusalem. Normally we don’t think about “journeying” to church together. We just get in our car and go. But a pilgrimage is shared by many. There’s solidarity and community.

Pray: Think of all the people walking right now all over McHenry County. Pray for those walking today, and for those walking with you. “God, bind us together in your name.”

Psalms of Ascent: “Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness. Yahweh remembers us and will bless us: He will bless the house of Israel... he will bless those who fear Yahweh – small and great alike” (Ps 115).

Third midway pause

Reflect: A pilgrimage taxes the body, and so the soul. Unless your walk is short, by now you may be tired, your feet may be sore, you might be hungry, or have to use the bathroom. You’re ready to be there! (Imagine what it was like for those in Jesus’ day under their conditions.) A pilgrimage is hard. So is following Jesus. It reminds us to walk with him even when it’s hard. It reminds us that our current life is a journey, not a destination. We are pilgrims with our home in the new creation.

Pray: For strength, endurance, and energy this final leg. “God, use my discomfort to remind me of how you suffered for me and of my reliance on you.”

Pilgrim Psalm: “How lovely is your dwelling place, Yahweh Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of Yahweh; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage” (Ps 84:1-5).

When you arrive at the FOF cross

Reflect: You’ve arrived! Take a moment before you enter “the gates” and use Psalm 118 (sung by pilgrims in Jerusalem) to celebrate and prepare for what awaits.

Psalms of Ascent: “Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to Yahweh. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation. This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Yahweh, save us [*hosanna*]; Yahweh, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh. Yahweh is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good; his love endures forever” (Ps 118:19-29).