

## WHAT DO YOU STAND FOR?

by Lester J. Start

Undated

### A Palm Sunday Sermon

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week, a period set aside and solemnly celebrated by Christians throughout the ages. As we celebrate Palm Sunday this morning, we join that mighty throng, but, more important, we join the spirit of the actual events which took place in that last week of the life of our Lord. We join the joyous chorus of those who waved the palm branches, welcoming Jesus riding triumphantly into Jerusalem, of those who sang "Hosanna: blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord." But as we join in the happy chorus we can see from the vantage point of the centuries a shadow falling on the sunny scene, the shadow of a cross stretching forward to a hill called Golgotha, a bleak and barren place, where the man who was welcomed so joyously was hanged, deserted by those who had lined the streets to cheer him. More, the very voices that cried hosannas were those that later screamed "Crucify him". "These things understood not his disciples at first," reports John. Even the disciples did not recognize at first the kind of King they were welcoming, the unique personality they were standing for. But we from our vantage point, with the whole drama before us, this great epic of salvation before our eyes completely, have no cause to misunderstand. We know who He was; we know what He stood for. And, if we join the Palm Sunday cries of welcome, we know what we are standing for. We know that as we stand to welcome him, we must stand for him; we know that the joyous cries will die in our throats as we see Him on the cross; but standing for Him means standing by Him now though everyone else desert Him, believing firmly in the resurrection of that power and goodness from God which can never die. In short, Palm Sunday presents us with the question, "What are you standing for?": a momentary excitement of weak welcome, or a share in the spirit of the cross and resurrection; a bystander at the celebration of a particularly vivid and colorful religious holy day, or a witness to and sharer in a deep and abiding religious experience? Do we stand for the fickle and foolish crowd, or do we stand for Jesus?

For make no mistake about it: each and every one of us stands for something. Every one of us has a power of representation, whether we are aware of it or not. We see this power of representation clearly in the characterizations of individuals that appear in literature. Some of you, I am sure, have read that great classic, Pilgrim's Progress; you will remember the characters that appear; their names describe them. There is Avarice, and Lust, and Slander, and Faith and Hope, and Christian moving confidently against all kinds of obstacles. And Dickens is noted for making his characters stand for certain qualities: Uriah Heep, the epitome of false humility, Scrooge, the picture of blind churlishness. And Shakespeare's Hamlet represents weak vacillation. These characterizations are so impressive in literature, because they remind us of life.

In life as in literature people are known by certain characterizations and, these characterizations or representations are nothing else but the things these people stand for. Think for a moment of great figures in history. Take away from them the things they stood for, and their characters are empty. Take away from Lincoln, for example, his love of freedom, his devotion to humanity, his gentleness, his love of country, and what do we have left? Stripped of the things he stood for, he

becomes an ungainly, grotesque figure, and object of ridicule. Conversely we can think of people in positions of leadership who do not stand for the same high principles of devotion to truth and goodness, and they become objects of scorn or contempt. [Napoleon?] “We are like,” said Plato long ago, “the things we admire and love.” Our characters are determined by the things we stand for. Our characters are blank until we add the things we stand for. We are like the bleak wire of a light bulb, alive and incandescent only by the flow of something outside ourselves.

Remember, all of us represent something to others, and most important, to the one who counts most, God. “O, wad some power the giftie gie us, to see ourselves as others see us,” sang Bobbie Burns. To see ourselves as others see us. We may wonder about this. Why we are what we are, and that’s all, we may think. We’re what we appear to be. So might that lady have reasoned who was the inspiration of Burns’s lines. But she didn’t look as fine to others as she sat proudly in all her finery in church, for Bobbie Burns, for one, saw a louse crawling up her bonnet. We do not see ourselves so clearly as others; we are too close to see what we are standing for, probably because we do not stop and think about what we are standing for.

But if we do not stop and look at ourselves, if we do not pay attention to what we are standing for, we will find ourselves standing for the wrong things. The habitations of our lives are like the chambers of that house in Jesus’ parable: swept clean of evil spirits, it plays host to countless more evil spirits because it did not become filled with good spirits. We cannot assume that we will automatically become vehicles of good powers; we cannot assume, as so many tend to do, that we are completely righteous without ever giving a thought to our deeper duties to God and Man. For there are evil forces to contend with; those same evil impulses which crucified Jesus long ago are at work today, crucifying the highest in us. There is the face of evil in our midst. Perhaps it will be an incentive to a moral awakening in America to see the face of evil directly, as we have been seeing it recently in the televised reports of the Senate Crime Investigation Committee, in which we have seen the faces and in one case the nervous hands only, of leaders of the underworld. The face, the representation of evil is all about us. And it need not be the face of a criminal. Unless we stand for the right things, we will find ourselves giving expression to it. It may wear the face of impatience. How much trouble this causes. Lack of sympathy. cup of water. lack of charity. indifference to duty.

There are those about us who are known and respected for the good things they stand for.

Each represents something; each stands for something; what do you stand for?

II. The lowest of us can stand for the highest. drop and the ocean. lantern and the sun. honesty, love, devotion. So many great things to stand for. what do people think of when they look at you? what do you stand for? religious loyalties? Whistler and the picture

III. Standing for something requires faithfulness