



WHEN THEY GET TO THE CHURCH, SEVEN BUNDLES ARE waiting in the foyer, wrapped in burlap and tied with twine. There are two axes and two tree stumps, some folding tables and brooms for sweeping up. It is the Thursday before Palm Sunday.

The men pull open the packages and start chopping. When the ax comes down, the end of a branch flies into the air, landing in a pile on the floor. Two men command the axes, while two more carry the cut fronds from the chopping blocks to the tables.

At the tables, the rest of the members of St. Joseph's Men's Guild — twenty-two at the height of the evening — are assembled. Each man grabs a palm leaf and splits it into several strips, long but narrow enough to fit into a parishioner's hand. The palms are damp and sweet-smell-

ing, the color of hay with moss green at the edges.

When the holy day comes, these men will stand in this same foyer of the Immaculate Conception Church and hand the palms to the parishioners. The parishioners will then process inside, holding the palms, just as the Jews held them to honor Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey.

On this night in Cranston, the palm symbolizes "peace, family reunion" for one of the men cutting the leaves. For another, the palm urges reconciliation — an urging to sweep bad feeling out of your home before Easter Sunday. "If you want to make up with a relative or a friend," he says, "you take the palm, you go to this person, you kiss it and give it to them and say 'Peace be with you.'"

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