

Palm Sunday

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

In the Orthodox Church, the feast of Palm Sunday is one of great joy and celebration for today we not only celebrate the Lord's triumphal entrance into the Holy City, but we also recall the raising of Lazarus, for which cause so many gathered to welcome the Lord as the victor over death.

And in remembrance of this great day we carry palms and pussywillows and we cry out with the men, women, and children who spread their garments on the ground shouting, "Hosanna in the highest!" and "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!"

Yet as great as this Sunday is, it pales in comparison to the Sunday which will follow – the Sunday of Pascha. For as we know the joy of Palm Sunday is short lived, for there is still much for the Lord to accomplish. Today the crowds welcome Christ as the Messiah, yet they will soon turn on Him, and in just a few short days, they will cry, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

Likewise, today the disciples rejoice, having just witnessed the greatest of the Lord's miracles, the raising of Lazarus from the dead after he was four days in the tomb. Yet, as we know, their faith would soon be tested, and in the moment of trial, not only Peter would deny the Lord but all the other disciples would flee from His side – only St. John the Theologian and Mary the Mother of God being strong enough to stand by the Lord's Cross.

And so, we see Holy Week as something of a spiritual rollercoaster, with its ups and downs, not only for the crowds but also for the Lord's closest disciples – one minute they show great faith and the next they doubt.

One only has to recall the case of the Apostle Peter, who swore to the Lord that he would not deny Him, even if he had to die with Him, but then He denied the Lord not only once, but three times. Or the case of the other disciples who sought to be seated on His right and left hands in His Kingdom but could not watch even one hour with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane.

And in the next five days, through the liturgical services of the Church we will enter into the Biblical narrative, experiencing anew the events of the Lord's Passion week.

We will witness the Lord cleansing the Temple of those who turned His Father's house into a den of thieves, and we will hear Him tell the Jews that His Father's vineyard will be taken from them and given to those who will return its fruits.

We will be at table with the Lord when He establishes the Sacrament of Holy Communion at the Mystical Supper and we will hear Him tell His disciples that one of them will betray Him.

We will try to keep watch with the Master as He prays in the Garden of Gethsemane, but like the disciples our strength will fail as well, because though our spirit is willing our flesh is weak.

But the Lord will rouse us from spiritual sleep in order to witness His divine strength and stability as He accepts in meekness and silence both the betrayal of Judas with a kiss, and the unjust accusations of the Jewish and Roman leaders.

And when the crowds cry out for the Lord to be crucified, we will respond with Pilate, “Why what evil has He done?”, but we will be powerless to undo what salvation history has already recorded that “He was numbered with the transgressors” being crucified between two thieves.

And when we hear the confession of the wise thief, we will ask the Lord to help us make his words our own, not only in mind, but in the depths of our hearts – so that we can continually cry out to Him, “Lord remember me also, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom!”

And when the Lord cries out to His Heavenly Father from the Cross, “Into Thy hands I commend My spirit!”, we will likewise bow our heads and ask the Lord for the strength to face death with such firm hope and trust in God.

And finally, when the Lord is taken down from the Cross and buried in a new tomb, we will return to our homes to keep a spiritual Sabbath, a day of rest from worldly cares in anticipation of the Lord’s rising on the third day.

Brothers and sisters, the hour has come for the Lord to be glorified – not with the glory which He was given from the crowds who would later call for His crucifixion – but the glory which He shared from the beginning of the world with His heavenly Father – the glory of self-sacrificial love.

This is the glory which alone can overcome the power of death and grant new life. This is the glory which alone is eternal for all other glories will fade away – the pride of youth, good looks, wealth, intelligence, popularity, worldly honors – all of these are worthless when compared to the glory of God.

We recall that after the Lord’s resurrection as Luke and Cleopas were walking on the road to Emmaus, the Risen Christ joined them and not revealing who He was, He asked them the question, “Was it not necessary that the Christ endure these sufferings in order to enter into His glory?”

And beginning from Moses and the Prophets, He opened the Scriptures to them, expounding to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. And then, only

after He had departed from their midst, did they realize that the Traveler Who had accompanied them was the Risen Christ. And they said to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us in the way and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”

Brothers and sisters, the Lord is forever walking with us, talking to us, and opening the eyes of our mind to the understanding of His Gospel teaching. Remember, on the night in which He was given up, the Lord said to His disciples, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what His Master is doing. But I call you friends, for all things that I have received from My Father I have made know to you.”

The Lord reveals to those who have ears to hear, the deepest mystery of our faith – that is how one can pass from death to life, how one can be translated from earth to heaven. That is the Lord reveals to us the mystery of the Cross, the mystery by which He not only overcame the world, and sin, death, and the devil, but also the mystery by which we ourselves can share in His victory, for the Cross is as St. Paul tells us the wisdom and power of God for those who are being saved.

And so, as we enter upon Great and Holy Week let us resolve to delve into the deep mysteries of our faith by accompanying the Lord throughout His Passion, Death, and Resurrection. For by so doing, we will come to a better understanding of how we can imitate Him in our own struggles and sufferings.

But, even more than this, we will become more and more aware of how He Himself is accomplishing the mystery of our salvation within us. Our minds will be opened and our hearts will burn within us as we see how the crosses of our lives will ultimately lead to resurrection, new life, and to the glory of God – a glory which we have been called to share in.

The Lord calls us His friends, for He has revealed all things to us. Let us stay close to Him during this Passion Week, and let us be assured that He will likewise stay close to us when it is our own time to enter through the cross and death into eternal life in His heavenly Kingdom.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Glory to Jesus Christ!