
Palm Sunday 2020
Philippians 4:4-9 & John 12:1-18

Today we celebrate one of the great feasts on the Church calendar — the feast of Palm Sunday. On this day Christ enters the city of Jerusalem. But it's a momentary feast of joy and celebration, because tonight we begin the final leg of our journey towards Easter. Our mood will change from joy this morning to one of solemnity this evening, and almost of sorrow on Friday as we watch the great sacrifice Christ make for us on the cross.

In our Gospel reading Jesus enters Jerusalem with a clear mind, with compassion and for only one purpose. He didn't allow the adoration of the crowd, the knowledge that their praises would turn into hatred, nor the fear of his approaching suffering and death distract him. He knew the ride on his donkey led to his death. His action was one of supreme courage, extreme humility and the greatest of all Divine virtues, love. If we didn't understand the words of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians before this, we should consider them now: "Live according to what you have learned and accepted, what you have heard me say and do. Then will the God of peace be with you." We are told, Jesus was born in the likeness of man, humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death on the cross. St. Paul asks us to be of the same mind and emulate Jesus. He recommends we do nothing out of self-ambition or conceit. Instead, esteem others as better than ourselves and be more interested in the needs of our neighbors than our own. Jesus did this. Let me give you an example of how this works in real life.

An eminent psychologist who is also an author, tells of a man he met on the subway in New York City. The man had left his job for the State Department to work in a Youth Rehabilitation Center in the City with young men convicted of homicide. One of these, a fourteen-year-old boy, killed an innocent teenager in cold blood to impress a gang he wanted to join. At his trial he was convicted to spend years in a youth detention center. When the victim impact statement was to be read, the young victim's mother rose to her feet, looked the boy straight in the eye and said, "I am going to kill you." After about a year into his detention the mother of the victim visited the boy, bringing little gifts and money for cigarettes and an opportunity for conversation. No one else came. He had no family to speak of and had lived on the streets by his own wits. When the time of his release drew near, she asked what he would do and where he would live. He had no idea, but she said she could get him a job in a company a friend owned and that he was welcome to stay in her spare room for a while until other arrangements could be made. He accepted and lived in her house, eating her cooking, doing his laundry and going to work each day. After a while she called him in to speak with her and said, "Remember when I told you I would kill you? Well, that is what I have done. The young man who killed my son no longer exists. I did not want him to live any longer in this world. If you want, you can live with me as my son. Mine is gone and you can take his place, if you want to." He did that. She loved the murderer out of existence and into a new life. This is the kind activity of life, death and resurrection that Christ inspires!

St. Paul reminds us Christians to give our minds to what is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, virtuous, and praiseworthy. Palm Sunday is a time we all need this reminder as we enter the mystery of our salvation by Jesus Christ's journeys to the cross, descent into Hades, and His glorious resurrection.

Sometimes, what has been murky, and confusing becomes bright and clear, when what has been hidden is brought out in the open. Today is one such time. For Jesus Christ, who revealed that He is the resurrection and the life by raising His friend Lazarus from the dead, now enters Jerusalem as the long-awaited Messiah to the welcoming cheers of the crowd.

On Palm Sunday, it is clear who Jesus Christ is: The Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. How will we respond to Him as He goes to the cross for us? I hope with the love of God and faith, we will draw near and not abandon or ignore Him.

But it will take intentional focus and discipline to turn away from temptations, distractions, and unholy thoughts that become obstacles along our path. So, we must follow St. Paul's guidance to "Dismiss all anxiety from your minds" and allow "then God's own peace of God, which is beyond all understanding...[to] stand guard over your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

When we return to Church after the pandemic is over, as we receive our Palm branches at the end of the Divine Liturgy, let us take them to our homes and place them somewhere where we can always see them. Let the Palms remind us that Christ is the king of our families, that Christ is the king of our hearts, that Christ is the only true answer to happiness and meaning in our lives. And if we do proclaim Christ as our king, let us try and make time for Him in our daily life. Let us be reminded that He is the one with whom we will be spending eternity. Our careers, education, finances, our homes, and all the basic material needs in our lives are only temporary. Let us place Christ the king as the primary concern in our lives. It is only when we have done this that we will find true peace and happiness in this disease-ridden, confused and complex world.

Amen.