



## **PALM SUNDAY**

**April 28**

### **THE GOSPEL READING**

**John 12:1-18**

[The Triumph of Palm Sunday]

*Six days before Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazaros was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; Martha served, and Lazaros was one of those at table with him. Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it. Jesus said, "Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."*

*When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came, not only on account of Jesus but also to see Lazaros, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazaros also to death, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.*

*The next day a great crowd who had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" And Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it; as it is written, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" His disciples did not understand this at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that this had been written of him and had been done to him. The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazaros out of the tomb and raised him from the dead bore witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.*



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## THE SERMON

Six days before Passover, the Lord Jesus enters the final week on His way to the Cross. Passover was the most important Jewish feast, which points back to the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt. At that time, lambs were sacrificed for the salvation of the Jewish people from captivity, as the angel of God kept their children safe by passing over them and ultimately delivering them from the Egyptians. Since then, once a year, they celebrate the feast of Passover, which in Hebrew is called “Pesach,” from where the word *Pascha* is derived.

On Saturday before Passover, Jesus goes to Bethany, to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazaros. This family loved the Lord, and they were close friends with Him. The Lord had dined with the sisters before (Luke 10:38-42), and He had raised their brother Lazaros from the dead (John 11:1-44) as a foreshadowing to His own Resurrection. Mary and Martha were deeply grateful to the Lord, and they are making Him supper. This meal with friends anticipates the Mystical (Last) Supper, which we commemorate on Holy Thursday.

Lazaros is sitting at the table with Jesus. In this respect, Saint Cyril of Alexandria remarks that “in amazement the Evangelist says that he who had been four days dead [Lazaros] was eating with the Christ, to remind us of His God-befitting power. And he adds that Martha, out of her love towards Christ, served, and ministered at the labors of the table.”

With Jesus’s disciples present, Mary anoints the feet of the Lord with costly ointment as an act of worship and wipes them with her hair as an act of love. Judas, who will betray the Lord, objects to the use of costly spices — not because he cared about frugality — but because he was stealing from the treasury and desired the money for himself.

The Lord rebukes Judas for his greed and prophesies that Mary’s anointing is a preparation for His burial, which was to take place six days later. Judas is not just one person, but represents *each and every one of us*. When we allow our passions to rule over us, we become spiritually blind, our hearts harden, and we betray the Lord because we love the things of this world *more* than we love Him.

The next day, a great crowd who had come to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem heard that Jesus was on the way there from Bethany, which was less than two miles away. They take branches of palm trees and meet Him, shouting with praise: “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” Saint John Chrysostom says that the words show us the *divinity* of Christ. Hosanna means “save us.” And salvation comes, it is not brought. The former befits a lord, the latter a servant. Christ does not come in the name of a servant, but in the name of the Lord.

Jesus, riding on a donkey, fulfills the prophecy made five hundred years earlier by the Prophet Zechariah: “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting

on a donkey's colt!" (Zechariah 9:9). The great King had come, not on a horse and a chariot to defeat worldly enemies, but in humility and service to the spiritually lost, the sick, and the poor. He hid his Divine glory to defeat not earthly powers but a much greater adversary, indeed the *greatest* enemy: He came to trample down upon death by His death.

The Messiah is ready to enter Jerusalem, the city of the King. Spreading people's outer garments and branches on the pathway was customary to greet a royal figure entering the city. But this was no ordinary King, but the King of Israel and the King of the Universe, the creator and ruler of all, the Angel of Great Counsel who brings His peace to the world. The branches of the palm trees symbolize Christ's victory over the evil one and death.

However, according to their own Messianic ideas, the religious establishment of Israel at that time wanted a Messiah who would liberate them from the Romans. Because of this, many of the people who now exclaim "Hosanna!" would be calling for Him to be crucified six days later.

This reminds us to ground our faith in a proper understanding of Christ's love and character. The Lord's work is not meant to fulfill our selfish expectations, because we would then be worshiping a god of our imagination. In turn, this may easily become a temptation for us to blame God for not doing what we want Him to do. If we do not understand who Christ is and how He loves us, we might find ourselves looking for Him to act how we want when difficult situations arise. And we might even be tempted to turn away from Christ.

However, the Lord loves us so much more than our limited comprehension allows. His purposes are beyond our understanding, and they are always intended for our salvation. Let us remember that when good or bad things happen to us, it is allowed by God for our spiritual benefit. On Palm Sunday, the Blessed Lord comes as a *humble* King, and the entrance of Christ into Jerusalem is a symbol of His entrance into our *hearts*. Christ is the King Who reigns even now in the midst of our sufferings and failures. Salvation has come to us if we trust our King as our only hope.

The Lord Jesus is *always* with us. He has entered the Temple, He established the Church, and ministers at the altar of our hearts. Let us remember Mary and Martha's joy and gratefulness to the Lord, who brought the Resurrection to their own home, as He does with us. Let us also remember Judas' betrayal, for we too can allow our passions to overcome us if we do not trust in the Lord completely. This is why we fast on Wednesdays throughout the year, because we remember the betrayal of Judas, and we soberly contemplate our own faithfulness to the Lord.

Trusting in Christ and accepting His grace, we follow His example of how to *struggle*, to *love*, and to *forgive*. We learn humility from the great King who rode on a donkey and participated in the crowd's joy, knowing they would crucify Him six days later. Christ is full of compassion and love. His love does not falter or waver. His love is steadfast no matter what is done to Him. He is always with us as we continue our journey through Holy Week to Great and Holy Pascha.

As Christ enters Jerusalem, let Him enter our hearts. Let us receive Him with joy. Let us walk with Him on the way of suffering towards the Crucifixion. Let us lay down our own struggles, temptations, and sins at the foot of the Cross to die with Christ. And may we be resurrected with Him in a *new* life — a life of faith, peace, and love.