

**PALM SUNDAY
(TRIUMPHANT ENTRANCE INTO JERUSALEM)
MARCH 19/APRIL 1, 2007**

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

ST. JOHN 12:1-18

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel: *Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom He raised from the dead.*

There they made Him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him.

Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.

Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray Him,

Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?

This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.

Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.

For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.

Much people of the Jews therefore knew that He was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom He had raised from the dead.

But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death;

Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.

On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,

Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet Him, and cried: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.

And Jesus, when He had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written,

Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, Thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt.

These things understood not His disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things unto Him.

The people therefore that was with Him when He called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record.

For this cause the people also met Him, for they heard that He had done this miracle.

...

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, Thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.

[Zechariah 9:9]

He Openly Comes to Jerusalem

Jesus had gone to Jerusalem many times before, but in some instances He would stay out of sight due to the “envy of the chief priests, Pharisees and scribes”:¹

Now He enters *boldly* (emphasis supplied) into the city and appears to all. The time of His Passion is at hand, and He no longer hides, but gives Himself for the salvation of the whole world.²

The Lord had previously manifested His greatest miracle, the raising of Lazarus, and now many more people believed in Him. This, of course, inflamed the envy of the Jews even more, and henceforth they prepared their treachery (which led to His) Crucifixion and Death.³

He Comes in the Name of the Lord: He is True God

Now as He approached Jerusalem, many believed that He was greater than all the prophets. They acknowledged He had come in the name of the Lord. They took palm tree branches and went to meet Him crying:

Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.

(In saying,) Hosanna, they offered Him a hymn, which meant, Save us, (as if to say,) O Lord God, save us; for to save is proper only to God alone, and the Scriptures ascribe salvation to Him alone. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord: The Lord was said to be coming, as the One Whose coming the Jews awaited.⁴

These words clearly indicate they believe He is coming in the name of the Father, that He is true God as David's Psalms say.⁵ Those meeting Christ and rendering Him honour imagined He would reign over them "visibly," perhaps liberating them from Roman power and authority.⁶

Why the Mode of Transport?

Why does the Lord come to Jerusalem upon an ass's colt? To keep Zachariah's prophecy:

... which said, Fear not, Daughters of Zion: behold, thy king cometh, sitting on an ass's colt.⁷

Zachariah had contrasted the wicked rulers of Jerusalem with the Expected king:

Fear not, Him, because the king whom I prophesy to thee is *not such* (as these). He is *mEEK and hUMBLE* and displays nothing of pride (emphases supplied).⁸

See how Christ, God and King, comes to them, not riding a splendid steed as a great warrior might but just sitting on a lowly donkey! His choice of mount is quite significant: by Mosaic Law the donkey was an unclean animal. It symbolizes the unclean Gentiles. The Lord rides the donkey to illustrate that the Son of Man has come to 'clean up' these new people. He sits on the colt, as if on the Gentile race:

... subduing like a colt this insubordinate and uninstructed people, this *new race* (emphasis supplied), and leading it into the true Jerusalem once it has been tamed and made obedient to Him.⁹

We Must Be Like the Palms

The palm tree grows high with foliage at the top; it is straight and difficult to climb throughout. The same as Christ's Way of *true* Christianity. In addition, its branches

... also signified that He Who was being acclaimed with glory was a heavenly Being Who had come from on high.¹⁰

The palms also signify that Christ, through raising Lazarus, had conquered death:

For palms were awarded to those who were victorious in games and contests.¹¹

...

Moreover, every righteous man is likened unto Christ; therefore, it is said, The righteous man shall flourish like a palm tree, (Ps. 91:11) that is, like Christ, the true Man of righteousness.¹²

The Lazarus Effect

Those who were witnesses to the Lord's miracle raising of Lazarus were "heralds of His power". These people glorified Christ on His entry into Jerusalem because they believed He had done this miracle; otherwise "they would not have congregated so swiftly".¹³

We need to spread out our souls before the Lord's feet like the palm branches, subjecting ourselves to the Holy Spirit and "casting off the *old man* (emphasis supplied)".¹⁴ The spreading of the palm branches on Christ's route can be used by us in our quest for living in Christ's Way. Let's imitate the saints, whose lives are spiritually like the straightest and tallest trees. We will cut our branches from the spiritual witnesses of the saints' lives and spread them out in humble submission to our Lord. As we prostrate ourselves before Christ, we pray for His help in fighting the spiritual battles, to be, as it was intended, in His image.¹⁵

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Hieromonk German Ciuba (tr. from the Slavonic into English; tr. from the original Greek into Slavonic in the year 6851, A.D. 1343), *The Gospel Commentary*, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, p. 137.

² Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint John* [in preparation – tr. by Fr. Christopher Stade], *Gospel for Palm Sunday*, Chrysostom Press, p. 3 of 4 at http://www.chrysostompress.org/explanation/lent_6?CPSESSION=a492476d33c2378fe2cf.

³ Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

⁴ *id.*, p. 138.

⁵ *id.* plus see Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁶ *id.*, and Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

⁷ *id.* (and Zech. 9:9)

⁸ *id.*, pp. 139-140, Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁹ *id.* and Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

¹⁰ *id.*, and Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹¹ *id.*

¹² Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

¹³ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁴ Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

¹⁵ *id.*, pp. 142-143 for a fuller discussion.