

4-21-19 Christ the King of Glory

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Hosanna.

I pray that all of you can feel a little bit of Pascha in your heart and in your soul right now. The people of God gathered together in faith, believing in our Christ, our Savior, who is victorious. On this wonderful feast day, we cannot ever separate Palm Sunday from Lazarus Saturday. It is one long Sunday, in the sense of it being a celebration of resurrection. Even in the services, the way that we served yesterday was more similar to a Sunday than any other Saturday of the year, and we have to remember that this is a culmination of Christ's ministry on Earth.

For us Orthodox Christians who have been fasting for 40 days, Lent technically is over. We've finished the 40 days. We also have finished something today, like Christ has finished his earthly ministry, and it culminates. His witnessing to the people, his revealing himself as the Messiah, as the anointed one, the Christ who has come, is fulfilled on this day in Jerusalem. For centuries, the people of Israel have been anticipating the coming of the Messiah. In 1500 B.C., 1,500 years before Christ, Jacob said, "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until one comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his, and he will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest of branches." 1,500 years earlier.

A thousand years earlier, King David writes in Psalm 118, "Hosanna, save now we pray, O Lord. O Lord, we pray, send now prosperity. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. God is the Lord, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches up to the horns of the altar." And then the holy prophet Zachariah, only in 500 B.C., only 500 years, not a thousand or 1,500 years but 500 years before Christ, prophesies, saying, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your king comes unto you. He is just and brings salvation. He is meek and riding upon a donkey, even upon the colt of a donkey."

So the people of Israel had for centuries, centuries, been preparing for the coming of the Messiah, and that verse from Psalm 118, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. God is the Lord, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches up to the horns of the altar," it was recited daily for six days, this verse. All of the people knew it. And for six days it was recited daily during the Feast of Tabernacles and recited seven times on the seventh day, with the waving of branches.

We would say in the liturgical life of the people of Israel, they had been rehearsing for centuries for the coming of the Messiah. They had many prophets come. Even John the Baptist, they asked, "Are you the Christ? Are you the anointed one?" They've been anticipating for many, many centuries that the Messiah would come, and now Christ is three years into his ministry, and he's been healing all of the people, specifically the blind and the lame, which is a prophecy of the Messiah fulfilled. He is feeding thousands miraculously. He has raised the son of the widow at Nain from his coffin, the funeral procession going to the cemetery, and stopping the funeral procession, praying over the young man in the coffin and having him come to life again.

And now, in the eyes of the people, Lazarus has been raised from the dead, four days dead and stinking. We sing that. In the icon of the raising of Lazarus, if you look really carefully, you'll see in every traditional icon, one of the figures has his hand over his nose, because he stinks. Even

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they knew that that rotting began and that no one, we would think, who is actually decaying could be raised to life again. How could their spirit not only be restored to their body, which if someone is newly dead, at least their body is good condition? This man had been in the tomb four days. He was embalmed, and yet Christ, of his own will ...

It is very important to remember that when he stands at the tomb and he prays to the Father, and St. Gregory Palamas reminds us that we get this Trinitarian conversation that is very similar to the Trinity considering making man in his own image. And Christ talks to the Father, and he says, "I'm not talking out loud for my sake, but for yours, that you would hear me." And he does not ask the Father to raise Lazarus from the dead. He, as the Son, the logos, the second person of the Trinity, commands himself, "Lazarus, come forth." And the man comes out.

In the next scene we find Lazarus with the family, and he is eating. This is an incredible sign of being a true human being. It's Christ after the resurrection eating fish, having barbecued them on the beach when the apostles encounter him. He's a real human being. Lazarus is truly alive again. He's not an apparition, he's not a ghost, he's not a zombie. He's a real man, and he's eating dinner with his family. And the people realize, as Christ in the coming days heads towards Jerusalem, they realize that the Messiah has indeed arrived. The Savior is here. The King of Israel is known. The entire destiny of Israel is going to be fulfilled. The King is here, and Christ comes, and for the first time ever, we have in scripture him riding an animal rather than walking. And he takes a young colt of a donkey, an unbroken animal, an animal that no one else has ridden yet, both virginal and also gentle.

The fathers say that him riding this donkey is a sign of us, the unbroken gentiles, the barbarians that he is going to encounter and who are going to receive him and bear his word and bear him in the world. He enters into Jerusalem, and as they have researched for centuries, the people go and spontaneously gather together the palms and the branches of trees. They even start taking off their jackets and their shirts and laying them on the ground, so that even the feet of the donkey would not touch the dirt. This is a sign of a king being present.

And they receive him into Jerusalem. In this one moment, Israel receives Jesus Christ as they should. A great multitude is there. The phrase "great multitude" is only used twice in describing the multitudes that follow Christ, today at Palm Sunday and at the gathering in a week that will cry, "Crucify him."

So here we are as the people of God celebrating, being victorious with Christ, knowing that he will rise again from the dead. Not despairing in the coming week when we enter into suffering with him. We are faithful to him. We deny ourselves food and sleep in order to be with him, because we know that he is going to rise, and we are going to rise with him as well. At this time, in the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we have Christ going directly from the entry into Jerusalem to purging the temple with a whip made of cords for the second time.

And the minds of the leaders of Israel start thinking, "Hmm, who is this guy? He doesn't accept the way that we are running the temple. He doesn't accept where our tradition has gone. He starts teaching the beatitudes. He starts teaching people to turn the other cheek when they are struck, to do good to their enemies, to even love their enemies." And in the hearts of the

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people, they realize that the King has arrived, and he is not going to do what they have decided the King ought to do. They wanted war. They wanted to rule the Earth. They are imagining, as I remind you often, that they're going to be in battle. Christ is going to be behind the army. He's going to be supplying food miraculously for the entire army, no matter where they are or how far they are from the store.

And he is going to be raising to life every soldier struck down in battle. That's an army that cannot be conquered. That is an army that has divine power behind it. And Israel has longed for the restoration of itself, like it was centuries earlier when it was militant, when it did conquer lands, when it did establish itself through war. But the war Christ has revealed to us is not against flesh and blood. The war is against the fall. We sang over and over again yesterday and today that he has come to recall Adam. He is called to restore Adam. He is called to restore us. He has come to reverse the effects of the fall.

And we are going to do that, we are going to enter into the true kingdom that is not of this world, by imitating him. That is why we remember today, and we remember Holy Week, and we remember Pascha. Christ did not come to do the difficult things so that we did not have to do them. He came to do the difficult things so that we knew exactly what to do. We are to be like him. We are to imitate him.

So today we celebrate that for one day the world received him as King and Messiah, and now we are going to, after celebrating on this day with the blessing of Christ, the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life, joy, a little bit of Paschal joy already in us, we will rest and celebrate today and feast, and then go with Christ and watch what he does between his glory and his resurrection, that we might indeed imitate and be like him. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Hosanna.