

April 8, 2012

Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young
Entrance of the Theotokos Skete



Palm Sunday, April 8, 2012

“As he was drawing near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, ‘Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’” (Luke 19:37, 38)

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

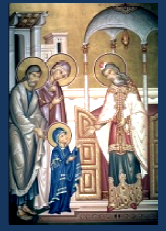
So now, brothers and sisters, we all of us “go up to Jerusalem” with our Lord Jesus Christ, there to witness the very last days of His earthly life and His saving Passion, Death, and Resurrection. There is no more important time, no more important week for Christians than this one. And there has been no more important week in all of history, in all of time than this one; and there will never be another like it.

Therefore, what can we say about today, Palm Sunday, and the days to come, that has not already been said by so many—Holy Fathers, saints, priests--, over and over, through the last nearly two thousand years? I myself certainly cannot say anything new, cannot contribute anything unique. So I’ll just try to pull out one or two threads from our magnificent and ancient Orthodox tapestry of holy commentary about this day and this week, and hold these very few small threads up for our consideration this morning.

First of all, we know from the Gospel accounts that the Lord Jesus knew that His time had come, and so He “set His face” (as Scripture puts it) to fulfill His divine destiny, the redemption of sinful mankind. So what happens today, as He enters the Holy City of Jerusalem and begins this fateful and cosmically important week, is no accident. He Himself literally *wills* all of it to happen, every single moment of it, from the beginning to its glorious end on Pascha.

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But as He enters Jerusalem on a donkey, there was absolutely no doubt what His own disciples were thinking about. They were exultantly remembering the prophecy from the Old Testament, which they were now seeing fulfilled before their very eyes:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass.” (Zechariah 9:9)

In other words, the long, long awaited Messiah had now come to His Holy City, and they, the disciples, were accompanying Him on this triumph. Of course, *they* were expecting Him to begin to rule the Jews from this day on, as a triumphant King who would expel the Roman conquerors. As another writer has put it, they had visions of greatness dancing in their heads! But they had already forgotten what the Lord told them about what He must accomplish, and how He would die and be raised again, when He said things like this: *“I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.”* (Luke 13:33) And this:

“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon; they will scourge him and kill him.” (Luke 18:31)

Because Christ was God as well as Man, He foreknew all of the details of this frightful coming week. He already knew that there would be no quick death for Him, but a lingering, savage, and vicious torture, with suffering such as no man would ever seek of his own will. And He knew the precise details of this suffering, too. He foresaw the terrible scourging, the crown of thorns, the mocking and the spitting, the cross, the nails, and the spear. He saw it all. That was because of as God He is all-knowing, omniscient. But as man He also saw how very *hard* all of this would be, how much pain there would be, the humiliation, the blood, the wounds—and in His human nature He trembled.

Brothers and Sisters, on this Palm Sunday let the Lord’s journey up to Jerusalem be our journey too. And let His journey through this awesome and difficult week also be our journey. Let us keep this week truly according to

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its name—“HOLY Week”—and let us eliminate all frivolous and unnecessary activities. Let us set aside everything that does not bring Christ into our hearts and homes. Let us attend any and every service the Church provides during this week—and there are services on each day, by the way. Let us immerse ourselves in the mystery of the Passion, so that we might worthily behold the Resurrection.

One final point this morning. There is a very interesting verse in the Book of Revelation:

“I looked and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Revelation 7:9, 10)

This reference to “palm branches in their hands” in St. John’s vision of the Kingdom of Heaven is most wonderful and indeed wondrous, for it tells us that there will be *another* Palm Sunday, an *eternal* Palm Sunday, one which is already on-going in eternity, but which you and I hope one day to see and participate in—the endless triumph of the Lamb of God, and Him crucified and risen, when you and I will also march in the procession, carrying palms of victory!

So, brothers and sisters: let us keep *this* Palm Sunday—today—in a fitting way, so that we may indeed one day behold the Eternal Palm Sunday that awaits us in the life to come. And may it be true for each and every one of us!

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