

Palm Sunday John 12:1-18



"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!"

The gospel of John that we hear today, on Palm Sunday, reveals to us a multitude of details concerning Jesus' entrance in Jerusalem. We discover different layers and dynamics of a community that is visited by Christ. We learn first that Christ does not only enter openly into the community which he loved, but He had also foretold his visit. In the prophets: *"fear not daughter of Zion ..."* (Zechariah 9:9). or in the psalms: *"This is the day which the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it; O Lord save now ... Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord"* (Ps 117). All the scriptures are foretelling the moment we celebrate today.

The scriptures speak about Christ and so does the silence of Lazarus who was resurrected by Jesus. He comes today within the light of resurrection that Lazarus is bearing in his heart as he sits at the table with Jesus. He wants people to know so they can openly welcome him, offer Him hospitality and be glad. The community is open at its very heart by the prefiguration of the eternal salvation that they witness through Lazarus' resurrection. The good news brings people together.

The coming of Christ touches all, by revealing also the instinct of a murderer. It is precisely His coming that triggers this instinct, which manifests itself in plotting against Christ: the news of eternal life, the good news of the resurrection, the good news of salvation, the good news that death is conquered by the one who loves the sinner. Jesus sheds tears before bringing Lazarus to life. (John 11:35)

We remember witnessing the same instinct in Cain when he kills his brother. Those who are not receiving Christ with joy, those who cannot partake of salvation, make a plot to kill him. They do not question their hardness of heart, but they act upon it. And together with Jesus, all those who bear within themselves the mark of the resurrection imprinted in their heart, all those who see the countenance of Christ, become a threat. What becomes a witness of eternal life is a threat for those who suffers from a coldness of heart. We pray that Christ, as He enters the gathering today, would teach us how to be glad and to rejoice deeply in the honesty of our own hearts. That the encounter of Christ today amid the gathering, establishes joy as the

foundation of our being, that we become rooted in this joy so no evil thought would trouble us again.

The plot of killing Jesus finds the one who can be seduced by money, the one who betrays, the disciple who knows who Jesus is. Somehow, they find each other. And as we hear in the gospel, they do it “for the sake” of the poor. The poor are used to justify killing. The real motives are never revealed because the poor can always be used as an excuse.

But as the gospel witnesses this betrayal today, so it witnesses for us the agape in the kingdom of heaven. Lazarus sitting at the table today prefigures the meal shared by Christ with the apostles after the resurrection. As it reveals the instinct of the murderer, it reveals also the gratuity of the love of the woman who anoints and washes His feet with her tears. This is a witness that the fullness of love can also come from a sinful heart, mirroring the love of the innocents. Even if we sin, we have no excuse to not love genuinely. On the contrary, we called to love more.

The multitudes are won over through love and the news of the resurrection. It is the other side of joy we live today. The plot of killing Jesus and his betrayal, are signs that those who are not able to sing for joy are left with no defence. It is through one man’s sin that death came into the world, and today it is through a few that cannot rejoice that the killing of Jesus is planned.

It is said the Jesus visits us today within the community not despite our sins but because of them. He is visiting the sinners. Because we are an imperfect community with a heart that can love and hate. With a heart that lacks in faithfulness. He touches all the dynamics and layers of the community, but He chooses to be close to those who suffered the most. With both the criminals and the innocents, without partiality. With those who suffered public shame and are crucified in the heart of the community. Today Jesus enters Jerusalem. He does not pass by as he did in Jericho. He goes deep within the heart of the community, where people are oppressed and sacrificed. He does not leave any stone untouched. But He chooses the corner stone, the one that is rejected, to lay His head.

Because Christ visits us the sinners today, we are moved to radical hospitality. There is nothing in us that should stop us from crying with joy at the encounter. As he enters the community today, and stays with those who are despised, so He comes within our own life. As unprepared as we might feel today, our hearts are asked to be radically open. To welcome Him so that He can fill with joy the establishment of our being. To render to us the innocence of joy. To heal the parts that we forgot were broken inside us. Indeed, we do not deserve many good things, but today He dares us to rejoice. Today we are not a community without a shepherd. It is Christ himself who has revealed himself to us.

“Michael yesterday died n put on Christ joining himself forever to the body of Christ which is the church”.

Michael’s baptism happened on Lazarus Saturday. It might have been on a Saturday that Michael came to the mission for the first time. It is the same love that Jesus shows to Lazarus that Michael felt in his heart from an early age. And he pursued and looked for this encounter in several ways. It is today, when the resurrection is prefigured, when the love conquers death, that Michael is baptized and sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Today Michael does not only witness his adoption in Christ by becoming the beloved son of the Father, but also the universality of the resurrection. Its light cannot be mistaken.

The wisdom of the people at the mission tells us that when we pick up our cross and follow Christ, the cross is not empty. We are called to carry others. Michael, “do you love Me?” We are called to carry Christ like the donkey did on Palm Sunday, and not be resistant like a “horse or a mule which have no understanding; whose jaws thou must hold with bit and bridle, lest they come nigh unto thee.” (Ps 31 – sung at the baptism)

As Michael looked for Christ in the many books he read, now he is called to find Him more in the scripture. As he looked for peace all over the world, now he is called to care for the oppressed so that peace can be manifested within the community as well.

Michael looked for Christ all his life, and today, because of his faithfulness, God gifts him the poor. As a witness of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

May God always comfort him and always be with him! May He grant him many, many years!



Announcements:

Yesterday, on Lazarus Saturday, we were blessed to be present and bear witness to Michael's Baptism and welcomed him into the Holy Tradition of our Orthodox Faith.

We have many beautiful services this Holy Week, so please take the time to review the schedule(make sure you have one) for the dates and times. If you are able, it's a wonderful blessing to be able to walk this path all together through all these services as a community for the benefit of all our souls.

For the service of Holy Unction on Wednesday evening, please ensure to bring your own small bottles for the Holy Oil.

Following the Passion service, reading of the 12 gospels and vigil until midnight on Thursday night, some may take the opportunity to stay overnight as well to keep vigil by the Cross. Bring a sleeping bag and snacks if you need to!

For the Agape meal on Pascha on Sunday morning following the Liturgy, please consider bringing some food to share as a sign of our love for one another as we enjoy this wonderful meal together.

Please email Miroslava if you'd like to help with any cleaning, flowers, food and any other arrangements. We welcome her back and pray for a speedy recovery for her.

As you depart today, please make sure to take lost of palms home with you as we celebrate Christ's entry into Jerusalem.

Kalo Pascha!

Happy Easter!

Φώτιος



St Silouan Chapel at St John's Mission

155 Broadview Ave. Toronto, ON M4M 2E9

T: 416-466-1357 E: info@stjohnsmmission.org W: stjohnsmmission.org

St Zoticos Orthodox Church at Good Neighbours Mission

193 Markham Rd Scarborough, ON M1J 3C3

T: 647-358-4105



We are an apostolate of the ecumenical patriarchate "Mother Church of Christ's poor" under the Omophorion of Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa

St. Silouan Chapel, April 13, 2025

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