

04/05/20

Palm Sunday

### **The entrance of the Servant/King**

#### **Matthew 21: 1-9**

Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.”

All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

*Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your King is coming to you,  
Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.*

So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them.

They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them.

And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:

Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Hosanna in the highest!

Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

With this Palm Sunday, we enter into what the Christian Church calls “Holy Week”—the days when we focus intently on what our Savior endured for us to win our salvation and on His resurrection-victory. In a very real way, what we meditate on this week remains with us, as a part of our life of faith, all year long.

We sit in spirit with His disciples in that “upper room” in which our Lord instituted for His Church the Holy Sacrament of His body and His blood—that sacred meal through which He seals to us His pardon and unites us so intimately with Himself. All year long, He regularly nourishes our faith with that holy mystery.

We go with Him to the Garden of Gethsemane; we watch as He prays so earnestly, St. Luke tells us, that the sweat falls from His brow “like great drops of blood;” and we hear Him say to His Father, “Nevertheless not My

will but Thine be done.” All year long, we join in that same petition when we pray the prayer which He Himself has taught us.

We follow Him to the mock-trials at which He is condemned, and we watch as He is so unjustly mocked and tortured. We accompany Him to the hill Golgotha where we watch as He is crucified to death; and we look on as His body is laid to rest in a tomb owned by a wealthy man. And then on Easter morning we rejoice together to hear the angel announce to us His victory. Every Sunday, all year long, we confess these truths to be the very heart of our creedal faith—that He “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, and on the third day He rose again from the dead.”

And the truths of Holy Week permeate every single day for us—they articulate and define the faith-life which has been given to us in Christ. As St. Paul reminds us, His death and His resurrection were poured out on us in our baptism, so that we are to live Good Friday and Easter Morning every day—dying with Him to sin through repentance and rising again by faith to live with Him that heavenly life of love which He won for us.

In our sacramental worship, in our prayer, in our creed, in how we live—what we meditate on during this Holy Week remains with us and shapes us every day, all year long. Today, on this Palm Sunday, we join the people of Jerusalem in greeting Him as He rides into the city. To welcome Him as our King—to open our hearts to Him in faith so that He may rule our every thought, word, and deed—that, too, is to be a part of our life at all times.

## I

St. Matthew tells us that Jesus sent two of His disciples ahead to procure for Him the donkey on which He intended to ride into Jerusalem. He was thus deliberately fulfilling the words which the prophet Zechariah had spoken centuries earlier, “Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The entry of Jesus of Nazareth into Jerusalem has none of the pageantry that one would expect from a king’s arrival at one of his subject cities. He wears no princely robes or stately armor. There is no crown on His head, no royal scepter in His hand. He is not carried down the street in some kingly chariot, nor does He ride a mighty warhorse. Instead, He is seated on a donkey—a common beast of burden. He comes in lowliness—in self-giving meekness and humility—because He is not like any other ruler.

Yet He is truly the greatest King of all—the very King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In the epistle-lesson for this Sunday, St. Paul tells us that this One who rides a donkey into Jerusalem “is God in His very form (or

nature).” He is the second Person of the Holy Trinity, the omniscient and omnipotent Son of God Himself who fills all things, who rules all things, and whose glory is from everlasting to everlasting.

## II

St. Paul also provides us with this explanation for the lowliness of Christ Jesus as He enters into Jerusalem. For our sakes, Paul tells us, this mighty and most glorious King has put on “the form of a Bondservant.” That is why He rides a lowly beast of burden. That is why He carries no sword. He has come, as He Himself has said, “not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

The evangelist Matthew abbreviates somewhat his quotation from the prophet Zechariah, because he expects his readers to look up the whole verse which he cites. The prophet actually writes, “Tell the daughter of Zion, behold, ‘Your King comes to you. He is righteous and having salvation, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.’” The reason for His humility—the reason for the “Servant’s form” which He has taken on Himself—is that He comes to bring us righteousness and salvation. He comes to rescue us by atoning for our sin and by imparting to us—through our faith in Him—His own perfect holiness. The salvation He brings with Him as He enters Jerusalem is the pardon which He will purchase for us with His own blood. It is the new life which He will win for us by smashing the power of the grave.

The service He offers is for you and me. It is as our Substitute that He will suffer and be condemned. It is bearing the punishment that belongs to us that He will be crucified. It is our death that He will die, our grave that He will enter. St. John tells us that the very essence of our triune God is love. The measureless, self-giving love which moves the Lord’s Anointed to become a Servant and to endure all this for our sakes—that love is therefore the truest mark of His divinity. That love is His greatest glory.

## III

St. Matthew tells us that the people gave Jesus a truly royal welcome as He rode into Jerusalem. Crowds lined the streets. Groups of people walked in front of Him and behind Him. They spread their clothing and palm branches in His path, and others waved palm branches in the air to honor Him. And they sang to Him those words of the Psalmist which have become part of our Communion service in the liturgical song which we call the *Sanctus*, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” We know all too well that, for the great majority of these people, their praise of Jesus would not last. Most of them did not understand the service that He had come to perform. They

wanted an earthly ruler who would free them and feed them and make them prosperous. And when it finally became clear to them that He had not come to be such a king, most of them would stop cheering for Him. Many, in fact, would turn radically against Him, and some of the same voices which now sang His welcome would, later in this same week, shout for His death by crucifixion. But for a brief moment on that first Palm Sunday, they thought He was a King. And therefore they gave Him a royal welcome—the best that they could offer.

You and I have been blessed to know who this One truly is who enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey. We have been taught by the Holy Spirit to see past His humble appearance, to know Him as the very Son of God Himself, born for us of the holy Virgin in order to give us life. To us it has been given to believe in the Gospel of that salvation which He brings—to believe that it is for us that He has made Himself to be a Servant, that it is to win forgiveness for us that He comes to shed His blood and to die. To us it has been given to know and believe that His triumph on Easter morning was not for His own benefit but for ours. To us it has been given to know that He is the greatest King of all. How shall you and I greet Him?

To welcome this King into our hearts so that He may rule there and govern how we think and speak and act—that, too, is to be part of our life all year long. To honor Him with our gifts, to sing His praise, to tell others of the true glory which belongs to this One who enters Jerusalem as a humble Servant—that is what fills every day for us with real purpose.

May the Holy Spirit grant us the faith and love so to honor our King! That is our prayer in Jesus' holy name. Amen.