

The Confessor's Tongue for April 12, 2009

Palm Sunday: Entrance of Our Lord into Jerusalem

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

The Entry of Our Lord into Jerusalem

Two memorable events bring Our Jesus Christ's earthly mission to a climax—the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead and His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. These two events, witnessed by great crowds of people, gave a clear and convincing testimony concerning the messianic mission of Christ and His divinity. These two illustrious events also raised the curtain on the last act of the drama of Christ's life: His passion and death.

The festival of the triumphal entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem is one of the oldest feastdays in the Eastern Church. Testimony regarding its celebration reaches back to the third century. The celebration of this festival began in Jerusalem, and within a short period of time became a feastday for the entire Eastern Church.

On Palm Sunday, the faithful hold palm or olive branches in the service, and if they live where such trees do not grow, pussy willows are substituted. Among the Jews and Romans, the palm branch was the symbol of victory. For this reason it was held in the hand during a triumphal or victory procession. Also, at the public games, the victors were presented with the palm branch as a sign of victory.

The branches are blessed during Matins of the Vigil after the reading of the Gospel and Psalm 50. They are distributed to the people along with a small candle, a symbol of the resurrection, which is held lit for the duration of the service.

Among the Slavs, the blessed willow/palm branch was never destroyed. Instead, it was placed in the house behind an icon or planted it in the garden. With it they blessed cattle when they were led for the first time to pasture. In some places, a blessed willow branch was placed in the hands of the deceased so that at the general resurrection they would meet Christ carrying the emblem of victory. As they were going out of the church on Palm Sunday, the faithful would lightly strike one another on the shoulder with the willow branch, saying: "It is not I who strike you, but it is the willow branch; within a week we shall celebrate Pascha." Thus did they remind one another that Pascha was drawing nigh.

The Jews wanted to see their Messiah in power and glory. Accordingly, Jesus Christ, by raising Lazarus from the dead and by His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, gave them clear proof of His power and glory. He demonstrated, publicly, that He is not only the Lord of living and dead nature, but also Lord of the hearts of men. Such a triumphal procession Jerusalem had not witnessed for a long time.

St. Matthew the Evangelist confirmed this: 'And when He entered Jerusalem, all the city was thrown into confusion, saying: "Who is this?" But the crowds kept on saying: "This is Jesus the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee. (Matthew 21:10-11)

The honor given to Christ lasted for only a brief moment, for His betrayal by Judas, His rejection by the people, His condemnation by the Jewish leaders, His passion, the way of the cross and crucifixion followed in quick succession. These very same people, who on Sunday cried out, "Hosanna", within a few days would be crying out: "Crucify Him."

Palm Sunday teaches us the instability of worldly glory and the vanity of earthly happiness. Joy and sadness here on earth are two inseparable sisters. Therefore, if we wish one day to have a share in the triumph of Christ in heaven, we must first undergo a Passion week and a Golgotha with Him here on earth. Only then, will we be able, like Him, to enter into everlasting triumph, joy, and resurrection.

Concerning Great and Holy Week

We now enter the most sacred week of the year. It starts with the feast of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, which, along with the raising of Lazarus, forms a prelude of joy and glory to the harrowing humiliations which are to follow. The Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of Holy Week are a preparation for the Passion. They already have a strongly accented character of mourning and repentance. The Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of Holy Week belong to the Paschal solemnities—each one of these days reveals to us a special aspect of the Mystery of Pascha. One could even say that this mystery has three aspects, each of which corresponds to a day: Holy Thursday, Holy Friday, and Holy Saturday. One could also say that each of these three aspects corresponds to a place: the Upper Room, Golgotha, the Holy Sepulchre. Holy Thursday commemorates the mystery of the upper room, Holy Friday the mystery of Golgotha, Holy Saturday the mystery of the tomb of Christ. On the Thursday, in the upper room, Jesus, through a sacramental action, both announces and represents, consecrates, and offers what is to take place during the following days. On the Friday, at Golgotha, Jesus, by His death on the Cross, accomplishes our redemption. On the Saturday, Jesus rests in the tomb: but the Church, already looking ahead to the feast of Pascha Sunday, speaks to us of the victory over death that our Savior has won. This anticipation of the Resurrection on Holy Saturday allows us to say that the mystery of Christ's Resurrection, triumphantly celebrated on Easter Sunday, already belongs, although incompletely, to Holy Week. And so this week constitutes a summary of the whole economy of our salvation.

Holy Week is the most solemn week of the entire year, celebrating the events of our salvation. The Holy Services should be our primary task each day; we schedule all other events around them. Children should be regular participants, even if it

means leaving before a service is finished. They should not be deprived of the Week's blessings.

A blessed silence should reign in our homes with no television or radio, etc. Lipstick should not be worn when venerating holy objects: Cross, Winding-sheet, Chalice, Icons. Old palms and willows should be placed in an area to decay where they will not be disturbed, as they have been blessed.

The Tradition of the Pascha Basket

On the Great Feast of Pascha, in most parts of Eastern Europe, Orthodox Christians bring to the church a basket containing those foods that they have abstained from during the Fast—both meat and dairy products. It contains some of the foods we shall eat to break the fast after the Paschal Liturgy.

Some people include a nut roll, wine, cheese, butter, decorated hard-boiled eggs; and meats such as lamb, bacon, sausage, roast beef, or ham.

The rich Paschal Bread (kulich) symbolizes Christ, the living bread (John 6:51) who came down from Heaven to give life to the world. The meat products symbolize the sacrificial animals of the Old Testament, which foreshadow the true sacrifice of our Savior. The dairy products remind us of the prosperity of peace of the Messianic times which had been foretold by the Prophets. Eggs were always considered a symbol of resurrection—the emergence of new life. At Pascha, our Savior came forth from the tomb as chick after breaking the shell at birth.

The Pascha basket is usually covered with a decorated scarf or white cover. The baskets are blessed following the Paschal Liturgy. After the baskets have been blessed, we break the fast. Some head home to break it, others remain at the church to break the fast together, sharing the contents of their baskets with one another. As we endure the struggle of the Fast together, it is fitting that we share together the joy of Christ's Resurrection and the Feast it brings to us.

On the Profit of Spiritual Teachings— Even When One Does Not Recall Them

A brother said to an old man, "See, abba, I frequently ask the Fathers to give me an earnest reminder for the salvation of my soul, and I do not remember a thing of what they tell me." Now the old man had two empty vessels, and he said to the brother, "Go, bring one of the vessels and pour water in it: rinse it, pour it out, and put it back in its place, all shiny." The brother did this several times, and the old man said to him, "Bring both vessels at once." And when he had brought them, the old man said, "Of the two, which is cleaner?" The brother answered, "The one I put water in and cleaned." Then the old man said to him, "Son, thus it is with the soul that frequently hears the word of God; though the soul remembers nothing of what she asked, she is nonetheless cleansed more than the soul that did not inquire."

April Namedays

10 Terry (Terence) Stevenson (Martyr Terence)
16 Frieda Galina Gluschenko (Martyr Galina)

April Birthdays

17 Debra Sancer
18 Dax Stokes
22 Chandler Jones
22 Lois Lyda
25 Terry Stevenson
30 Evan Rivas

The Church & the Bible

Fr. Georges Florovsky

The Orthodox Catholic Church is commonly supposed to be, as it were, over-liturgical and to have underestimated the preaching of the Word. This is an obvious misunderstanding. The rites of the Church are basically the preaching of the Word, and emphatic proclamation of the Good News. The skeleton of the order of the services (Vespers, Compline, Hours, Matins, etc.) is Scriptural in that the scheme of the history of God's plan of salvation is woven through them. Most of the hymns and troparia are Biblical in their inspiration and content. Readings from the Scriptures are incorporated into all the worship services. The sermon is regarded as an integral part of corporate worship, especially on Sundays and special occasions.

Everything is oriented towards the redeeming events of the past, in which the reality of the Church is existentially rooted. The whole structure of worship is corporate in its inspiration and objective. Private devotions are used to prepare the individual to share in the fellowship of the whole fellowship of believers, the Church.

The ultimate aim of worship is to establish and to perpetuate an intimate communion with God, in Christ Jesus, and in the community of His Church. The ultimate emphasis is spiritual. The aim of Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, by whom believers are established in the fellowship of the Church.

Hence, as the services are basically the preaching of the Word, we do well to attend the services and to listen attentively to better understand our faith, to acquire a more fully Christian mindset, and to encounter God. This Holy Week come to bear the Faith proclaimed! —Fr. Justin

Upcoming Events 2009

12 April, Palm Sunday
12-18 April, Holy Week
19 April, Pascha! Paschal Picnic
25 May, Memorial Day Picnic
16-19 August, Proposed men's retreat at Holy Archangels Monastery. Let Father know if interested.
7 September, Labor Day Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!