

The Confessor's Tongue for April 9, A. D. 2023

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 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.

On Knowing One's Weakness

St. Isaac the Syrian, From Homily 8

Blessed is the man who knows his own weakness, because this knowledge becomes to him the foundation, the root, and the beginning of all goodness. For whenever a man learns and truly perceives his own weakness, at that moment he contracts his soul on every side from the laxity that dims knowledge, and he treasures up watchfulness in himself. But no one can perceive his own infirmity if he is not allowed to be tempted a little, either by things that oppress his body, or his soul. For then, comparing his own weakness with God's help, he will straightway understand the greatness of the latter [God's help].

And again, whenever he looks over the multitude of his devisings, and his wakefulness, his abstinence, the sheltering, and the hedging about of his soul by which he hopes to find assurance for her, and yet sees that he has not obtained it, or again, if his heart has no calm because of his fear and trembling: then at that moment let him understand, and let him know that this fear of his heart shows and reflects that he is altogether in need of some other help. For the heart testifies inwardly, and reflects the lack of something by the fear which strikes and wrestles within it. And because of this, it is confounded, since it is not able to abide in a state of surety; for God's help, he says, is the help that saves. When a man knows that he is in need of Divine help, he makes many prayers. And by as much as he multiplies them, his heart is humbled, for there is no man who will not be humbled when he is making supplication and entreaty. 'A heart that is broken and humbled, God will not despise.' Therefore, as long as the heart is not humbled, it cannot cease from wandering; for humility collects the heart.

But when a man becomes humble, at once mercy encircles him, and then his heart is aware of Divine

help, because it finds a certain power and assurance moving in itself. And when a man perceives the coming of Divine help, and that it is this which aids him, then at once his heart is filled with faith, and he understands from this that prayer is the refuge of help, a source of salvation, a treasury of assurance, a haven that rescues from the tempest, a light to those who are in darkness [etc...] From this time forward, he revels in the prayer of faith, his heart glistens with clear assurances, and does not continue in its former blindness and the mere speech of the tongue. When he thus perceives these things, he will acquire prayer in his soul like some treasures. And from his great gladness, the form of prayer is turned into shouts of thanksgiving. This is the very thing pronounced by one who has defined the form proper to each of our actions: 'Prayer is joy that sends up thanksgiving.' Here he speaks of the prayer that is achieved through the knowledge of God, that is, prayer that has been sent from God. For at that moment, a man does not pray with labor and weariness (as is the rest of his prayer, which is prayed before the experiencing of this grace), and because his heart is full of joy and wonder, it continually wells up gratitude while he silently bows the knees....

On the Baptismal Garment: the Robe of Light

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water & the Spirit*

We know already that the vesting of the catechumen before Baptism signified the rejection of him of the "old man" and the "old life," that of sin and corruption. It is indeed *sin* that revealed their nakedness to Adam and Eve and made them conceal it with vestments. But why were they not ashamed of their nakedness before sin? Because they were vested in divine glory and light, in the "ineffable beauty" which is the true nature of man. It is this first garment that they lost, and they "knew that they were naked". But then the post-baptismal vesting in the "robe of light" signifies above all the return of man to the integrity and innocence he had in Paradise, the recovery by him of his true nature obscured and mutilated by sin. St. Ambrose compares the baptismal robe to the vestments of Christ on Mt. Tabor. The Transfigured Christ reveals perfect and sinless humanity as not "naked" but vested in garments "white like snow," in the uncreated light of divine glory. It is Paradise, not sin that reveals the true nature of man; it is to Paradise and to his true nature, to his primordial vestment of glory that man returns in Baptism.

The Tradition of the Pascha Basket

On the Great Feast of Pascha, many Orthodox Christians bring to the church a basket containing those foods that they have abstained from during the Fast—both meat and dairy products.

The rich Paschal Bread (kulich, full of eggs and butter) 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, especially the rich cheese pascha, 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. Our Savior came forth from the tomb as chick from its egg at birth.

The Pascha basket is usually covered with a decorated scarf or white cover. The baskets are blessed following the Paschal Liturgy: after Liturgy, pull back the cover that the contents may be blessed and light the decorated candle included in your basket. After the baskets have been blessed, our custom is to break the fast together. (Some consider it proper to eat first of what is in the basket before moving on to other food.) 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.

Paschal Greetings in Various Languages

Greek: Christos anesti! Alethos anesti!

Slavonic: Khristós voskrésye! Vo istinu voskrésye!

Russian: Khristós voskrés! Vo istinu voskrés!

Arabic: El Messieh kahm! Hakken kahm!

Romanian: Hristos a inviat! Adevărat a înviat!

Serbian: Cristos vâskres! Va istinu vâskres!

Georgian: Kriste aghsda! Cheshdmaritad aghsda!

Finnish: Kristus nousi kuolleista! Totisesti nousi!

Japanese: Christos fukkatsu! Jitsu ni fukkatsu!

German: Christus ist auferstanden! Wahrlich er ist erstanden!

Norwegian: Kristus er oppstanden! Han er sannelig oppstanden!

Latin: Christus resurrexit! Vere resurrexit!

Spanish: Cristo ha resucitado! En verdad ha resucitado!

French: Le Christ est ressuscité! En vérité il est ressuscité!

Italian: Cristo e' risorto! Veramente e' risorto!

Portuguese: Cristo ressuscitou! Em verdade ressuscitou!

Eritrean-Tigre: Christos tensiou! Bahake tensiou!

Swahili: Kristo amefufuka! Kweli Amefufuka!

Welsh: Atgyfododd Crist! Atgyfododd in wir!

Yupik: Xris-túsaq Ung-uíxtuq! Iluúmun Ung-uíxtuq!

Kris TOO Sahq Ung OOIKH took! Ee LOO Moon oong OOIKH took!

Upcoming Events 2023

9-15 April Holy Week

14 April Holy Friday: 10:00 a.m. church cleaning and decoration

15 April Holy Saturday: Baptisms 10:00 a.m.

15 April 11:30 Paschal Vigil

16 April 3:30 a.m. Blessing of Paschal Baskets

16 April 3:00 p.m. Agape Vespers, Paschal Picnic, Egghunt

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!