

# The Confessor's Tongue for April 13, A. D. 2025

## Palm Sunday: Entry of the 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.

### **At the End of the 40 Days**

*Having completed the forty days, many of us may be discouraged that we have not made more progress in correcting bad habits, overcoming sins, drawing nearer to Christ. This word from St. Moses of Optina from a letter he wrote to his cousin, a nun, will encourage you.*

*What St. Moses says may be taken as an elaboration of something the Prophet Ezekiel saw. When the Lord was about to send final judgment on Jerusalem, he sent his angel and said: "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof" (Ezekiel 9:4). Our sighs and cries have power.*

### **Consolation for Those Who Doubt Their Spiritual Progress**

*St. Moses of Optina*

Of course you and I, who are feeble, have no need to converse about great feats of asceticism and exalted virtues—just about weaknesses and the trials of life. I was pleased with the last letter of yours—that is what they should always be like. You write to me straightforwardly and trustingly concerning your infirmity. I am pleased with this acknowledgment of yours, because even the Apostle Paul acknowledged before the entire world that if he was strong, it was by the grace of Christ, but that of himself he was weak. He says, "Most gladly will I rather glory in my infirmities", and "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? For in my flesh dwelleth not good thing."

Listen to me, dear sister. Do not trouble your soul over the fact that you are weak and that you do not correct yourself. Of course, it may be that you have not corrected yourself in a big way, but I trust that you have in small things which you do not even see, and they can add up. they seem to be small and

insignificant, and yet they can be not only significant for your salvation, but even sufficient. Let me list at least some for you with which you are familiar and which you indeed possess on occasion:

*If at some time you show someone a kindness, you will be shown mercy.*

*If you co-suffer with someone who is suffering insignificant as this may seem), you are numbered with the martyrs.*

*If you forgive someone who offends you, not only will all your sins be forgiven because of this, but you will also become a daughter of the Heavenly Father.*

*If you pray from your heart for your salvation, even just a little, you will be saved.*

*If you reproach, accuse, and condemn yourself before God for the sins perceived by your conscience, you will be justified just for this.*

*If you confess your sins before God, even for this you will receive forgiveness and a reward.*

*If you grieve over your sins, or feel compunction, or shed tears, or sigh—even your sigh will not be hidden from Him, for St. Symeon the New Theologian says [Prayer before Holy Communion], “not even one tear, nor a fraction of a tear drop escapes his notice.” And Saint John Chrysostom says, “If you just lament over your sins, He will accept even this as cause for your salvation.*

See how much you have corrected without even knowing it! And it is well for you that it is this way, so that you will rather glory in your infirmities and not complacently gaze upon what you have corrected. Let the righteous Bestower of rewards appraise the latter. As for us, let us behold only our sins, repenting of them daily and taking care that they may be forgiven.

### **The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great II**

*Abba Anthony said, “He who wishes to live in solitude in the desert is delivered from three conflicts: hearing, speech, and sight; there is only one conflict left for him, and that is with fornication.”*

*Saying II in The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

*Commentary:* To live in the desert [a remote place] away from the world delivers one from three things that readily bring temptation and sin: hearing, speech, and sight.

Living in the world, we are constantly bombarded with noise: radio, television, music, news, the conversation of others. Our ability to hear is a portal to our soul. What we hear enters our minds and affects us, both for good or for ill, readily stirring up our passions and leading us into sin of various sorts, or encouraging us and inspiring us to do good. Particularly seductive are songs, whether for entertainment or advertising, which insinuate themselves into our minds and repeat there for hours on end, capturing the capacity of the mind for ceaseless prayer and displacing it with something banal or poisonous. The desert provides an escape from all this noise.

Managing our own speech presents a grave challenge to us. In Proverbs it is said (10:19), “Where there are many words, sin is unavoidable.” Talking too much robs us of God’s grace, even when the conversation is not inherently sinful. One can even speak too much about spiritual things! Hence at every Vespers we ask God “set a watch, O Lord, upon my mouth and a gate of enclosure about my lips,” and St. James tells us that the person who can control his tongue is a perfect man, who can control his whole body. The perfect, as St. Silouan describes, speak only as the Holy Spirit moves them. Living around people tempts us to speak far more than we need to as Christians who are called to wait upon the Lord and to be still and know that He is God. The desert provides a remedy to this.

How often sight leads us into temptation! Whether it is images in the media or just the physical forms of those around us, what we take into our souls through our eyes often leads us to lust, anger, greed, envy, and even hatred. We see someone’s beauty and are wounded by it through lust or envy; we see a person who has wronged us and anger arises in our hearts along with bitter memories; we see a person’s possessions and desire the same for ourselves, or wonder why he should have them when we do not. Moreover, the eye is never satisfied with new images; it is ever hungry for more if we indulge it, as we well know from surfing the web or scrolling on social media or youtube. We may be going about our business only to be suddenly struck unawares with the sight of something and find our thoughts stimulated and quickly led into temptation. The desert frees one from this conflict—assuming one does not bring the internet there with him!

Yet the desert does not free us from ourselves, from our thoughts or from bodily needs. Thoughts from fantasies or memories are ever at hand. Bodily need presses us. We have to eat and drink; eating too much, indulgence in the pleasure of food, living to eat, and so forth stimulates sexual desire and temptation. Indulging one form of bodily pleasure to the full stimulates the desire for others. This battle has to be fought wherever we may live, that our body with its needs lives in submission to our spirit which we have submitted to Christ.

Most of us will not and cannot flee to the desert to live, at least not permanently. But as Christians living in a fallen world in a wicked and perverse generation, we must cultivate the desert in our hearts, not allowing our senses to be constantly bombarded by the world’s messages and not allowing our tongues to wag as a form of idle entertainment or out of vainglory. We may remove unnecessary external stimulation so that we may be collected, at peace, and focused on Christ Jesus without the world’s vain and harmful distractions constantly pulling us away. We have enough to contend with what is already in our hearts, let alone the world’s constant additions thereto. A very effective way to cultivate the desert in our hearts is keeping vigil—either staying up past our

normal time for bed or rising from sleep in the middle of the night or early in the morning. In the quiet dark while the world sleeps, we may pray, read the Psalter, read the Scriptures, and practice the Jesus prayer, tuning our souls to the Holy Spirit. Building on this, during the day, while attending to our daily business, instead of curiously prying into what our neighbor is doing and what is happening in the world, we may choose to cultivate the Jesus Prayer in our soul along with awareness of Christ in us and around us. Many thoughts will intrude into our minds, but we will ignore many of them, not engaging them, and others we will turn into prayer and not be troubled by them. In this way, one may dwell in the desert while still living in the world. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

### **For Success With the Jesus Prayer**

*St. Ignatius Brianchaninov*

An indispensable, essential condition of success in the prayer of Jesus is the keeping of His commandments. *Continue ye in My love* (John 15:9), He said to His disciples. What does it mean to remain in love for the Lord? It means to remember Him unceasingly, to remain unceasingly in union with Him in spirit. The former without the latter is dead, and it cannot even exist. *If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in My love* (John 15:10). If we constantly observe the Lord's commandments, then by our spirit we shall be united with Him.

Direct your actions, all your conduct, by the commandments of the Lord Jesus, direct your words by them, direct your thoughts and feelings by them, and you will get to know the virtues of Jesus. When you feel within yourself these virtues by the action of divine grace, and when you acquire through these feelings an experimental knowledge of them, you will be ravished by the incorruptible sweetness which is not of this world or age, a gentle but powerful sweetness that annihilates the heart's inclination for all earthly enjoyments and pleasures. Having been ravished by the virtues of Jesus, you will love Him, and you will yearn for Him to dwell in you completely. Without Him, you will regard yourself as perishing and lost. Then you will cry incessantly, cry from the fullness of conviction, with all your soul: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.* The prayer of Jesus will replace all other prayers for you. And all of them—what thought can they contain and express more comprehensive than the thought of the pardon of sinners by Jesus? Make your one aim in life the doing of the will of Jesus in every circumstance, however important or trifling it may seem. *On the Prayer of Jesus, pp. 98*

### **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.

### **The Tradition of the Artos**

The blessing of the Artos is one of the special paschal rites, "in honor and glory and memory of the glorious resurrection" of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Artos is understood to be a Prospora with an image on it of the cross crowned with thorns or with the image of the resurrection of Christ as signs of victory of Christ over death. The word "Artos" is Greek; translated into Russian it means "bread".

The historical origin of the Artos is as follows: the Apostles, who were accustomed to partake a meal together with the resurrected Lord (Acts 10:41), after His ascension to heaven, remembering His covenantal words: "I am with you always" (Mt. 28:20), felt the invisible presence of the Lord through living faith in their assemblies, but could not see Him with carnal eyes. The natural expression of this burning faith of the disciples to their Teacher and their desire to have a constant reminder of His abiding with them, was that at a meal they left an unoccupied place for Jesus Christ to recline with them, but placed on the table before that place some bread as if for Him, and each time after the end of the meal, lifting up thanksgiving to God, lifted this bread, saying: "Christ is Risen."

When the disciples of Jesus Christ went away to various countries for the proclamation of the Gospel, they whenever possible tried to observe this custom: each of the Holy Apostles in whatever country

founded a new society of followers of Christ and when beginning a meal left a place and a fragment of bread in honor of the Savior, and after the end of the meal together with them glorified the risen Lord, raising up the fragment of bread placed in memory of Him.

What is accepted by the first students of the Gospel from the lips of the Apostles and was done by them daily, that is what the fathers of the Church of the following centuries have applied to the feast of the Resurrection of Christ in order to keep forever the apostolic tradition in the Church. In this way this custom was really kept in the Church and through a number of centuries reached our time. As the Apostles during their assemblies have placed the particle of bread in the place appointed for the Savior reminded them of the risen Christ, so, intentionally the Holy Church even at the present time places an Artos on Holy Pascha in the temple in full view of the faithful to serve as their same reminder of the invisible presence of the risen Lord with us. Thus, preparing the Artos, the Holy Church imitates the Apostles and by these blessed loaves remembers the appearances of the risen Lord to the Apostles.

At the same time the Artos reminds us that Jesus Christ by His death on the cross also has become for us the rising of the truly living bread. Such is the meaning of the Artos and is revealed in the prayer of its blessing (see below). Besides, in this prayer the priest, calling down the blessing of God on the blessed Artos, asks the Lord to heal any infirmity and illness and to grant healing to all who eat of the Artos. According to the Supplemental Book of Needs in monasteries the sanctification of the Artos is done on the first day of Holy Pascha and is done as follows: "The Artos, which is bread usually with a cross on it prepared for this, is brought to the priest in the sanctuary. After the Prayer before the Ambo and the ending of the Divine Liturgy, the Deacon says: "Let us pray to the Lord", and the clerics: "Lord, have mercy" and the priest reads this prayer over it:

"O All-powerful God and Almighty Lord, Who by Thy servant Moses during the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, and the liberation of Thy people from the bitter slavery of Pharaoh, didst command that a lamb be slain, prefiguring the Lamb, Thy beloved Son our Lord Jesus Christ, who voluntarily was slain on the cross for us, taking away the sins of the whole world, do Thou now also, we humbly pray Thee, look down upon this bread and bless and sanctify it. For we Thy servants, in honor and glory and in commemoration of the glorious Resurrection of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom we also have received remission, freedom and release from bondage of the eternal slavery of the enemy and from the indissoluble bonds of Hades, do now offer this before Thy Majesty on this bright, all-glorious and saving day of Pascha. Grant that we who offer this and kiss it and eat of it become partakers of Thy heavenly blessing, and by Thy

power burn away from us every sickness and infirmity, granting health to all. For Thou art the source of blessings, and the Bestower of healing, and unto Thee we send up glory, to the Unoriginate Father, with Thine Only-begotten Son, and Thine All-holy, Good and Life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages".

Choir: "Amen".

"Immediately the priest sprinkles the Artos with Holy Water (of Theophany) saying: "This Artos is blessed and sanctified by the sprinkling of this Holy Water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen", three times. And after this he goes out and places it on the Analogion, and the people, as they receive the Antidoron, kiss the Artos".

On the day of Pascha and during all Bright Week the Artos with an image of the Resurrection of the Lord is placed on an Analogion purposely arranged either in the sanctuary or in the temple. In monasteries after the Liturgy there is a procession to the refectory with the icon of the Resurrection of Christ, with the Artos, with a lampada or two, with the ringing of all bells simultaneously, and with the singing of "Christ is Risen!". After the meal there is a lifting up of the Artos. At the raising of the Artos, the cellarer says: "Christ is Risen!" once; and all respond: "Indeed, He is Risen". Then, having signed the Artos cross-wisely, he says: "Let us worship His three-day resurrection", and places the Artos on the Panagiaron (a special vessel). Then everyone kisses the Artos, singing the ninth ode of the canon of Pascha: "Shine, shine". After kissing the Artos sing the Hypakoe and the Kontakion of Pascha, then comes the Dismissal, and the Artos is then returned to the temple, according to the former order, and is placed in its proper place in the temple (for details see "The Order of the Blessing of the Artos on the day of Holy Pascha in the Ustav and the Pentecostarion). In parish churches during the cross processions done during Holy Pascha (see about them below), the Artos is carried around the temple. Both on the first day of Pascha and during all Bright Week the Artos with the image of the Resurrection of the Lord is placed on the Analogion in the temple.

#### Coming Events 2025

14-19 April: Holy Week  
19 April: Baptisms & Chrismations  
20 April: Great and Holy Pascha  
21-26 April: Bright Week  
27 April: Wanga—Wells Wedding  
18 May: Ramos—Cerimovic Wedding  
12-13 August: Bishop Gerasim visits  
5 October: St. Jonah feast day in Alpine with Bishop

**GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!**