13/04/2020

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for Palm Sunday



Holy Trinity Archdiocesan Cathedral New York, New York

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Σήμερον ἡ χάρις τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ἡμᾶς συνήγαγε, καὶ πάντες αἴροντες τὸν Σταυρόν σου λέγομεν· Εὐλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ἐν ὀνόματι Κυρίου· Ὡσαννὰ ἐν τοῖς ὑψίστοις.

Today the grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us together, and as we all take up Your Cross we cry out: Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest![*]

Indeed, my beloved Christians, it is the grace of the Holy Spirit that brings us together today – whether by video or audio, or most simply and indeed most

purely, by the intentions of our hearts – it is the Spirit of God Who unites us on this blessed Palm Sunday.

Today, our Western Christian Brothers and Sisters are celebrating Easter – and we wish them every joy.

But we are not there yet—although we already commenced yesterday, as today's Gospel says, "six days before the Passover,"[†] in the aftermath of the greatest of our Lord's miracles, the raising of Lazaros. This σημεῖον, this sign is the statement of our Lord Jesus Christ to the world of His love for us, and it is the backdrop for our present Feast.

The commotion stirred up in Jerusalem and in Judea—from Bethany where the miracle occurred, to the Temple precincts into which Jesus marched on this Sunday of the Palms—all of this signaled something extraordinary to the people. They hailed Jesus as their King, remembering the prophecy of Zechariah:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, humble and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.[‡]

When they saw Christ on the foal of the donkey, they remembered this prophecy, and they believed that Jesus was a king who had come to free them from the Roman oppressors. They did not understand that His "Kingdom is not of this world."[§]

They did not realize that this Nazarene from Galilee was, in truth, born in Bethlehem of Judea. He was no Galilean by blood at all, but rather a direct descendent from Judah, the fourth son of Jacob. Thus, they did not connect him with the other prophecy:

Binding his foal unto the vine, and his donkey's colt unto the choice vine; He washed his garments in wine, and His clothes in the blood of grapes.[**]

You see, my friends, our Lord is the True Vine,[††] and by riding upon the donkey colt – an animal considered unclean in Judaism and thus symbolizing all Gentiles – He binds our fate and that of every human being to His own. He takes upon Himself the salvation of all the Gentiles as well as all the Jewish People, not just the one man, Lazaros, whom He raised from the dead.

And what are the garments that he will wash in "wine … in the blood of grapes?" They are the human nature of every person who has ever lived or will ever live. He

comes to cleanse us, to purify our hearts and our humanity, and in order to do so, He has to shed His Precious Blood. He marches into Jerusalem on this Palm Sunday to unleash a river of love, a torrent of mercy, and a flood of forgiveness.

The crowds see only their faint hope of an earthly king:

a king without an army,

a king on a humble donkey – not a magnificent steed,

a king without a crown.

They cast their garments before Him. The cut down branches of palms and cover the road with them. They offer what they can, even in their ignorance of the moment. They see only an earthly solution to their worldly problems. But again, the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ is not of this world. And in only five days they will go from cheering for their 'king' to crying, "Crucify Him!"[‡‡]

Therefore, we must decide for ourselves. How will we meet the King of Glory? He is the One Who is coming this Holy Week to shed His Precious Blood for us and to wash our human nature clean.

Today, we may not be able to gather with our palms, but we can still lay down our garments before Him. We can have the intention to offer to the Lord the fullness of our human nature.

Each and every one of us – in our own way, can pave His rocky road to Golgotha with our love for one another, with our compassion for those who are suffering, and with our forgiveness for those who have wronged us. This is why the hymn that I began with exhorts us to willingly 'take up His Cross' like Simon of Cyrene, although in his case he was forced to do so by the Roman soldiers.[§§]

By loving those we may think unworthy of our love, by our empathy for those whom we do not know, and especially by forgiving those who have wronged us, we share in the Cross of the Lord. We share in His Holy Passion, τά Ἅγια Πάθη Του, by which His Holy Body is broken and His Precious Blood is shed for the life of the world.

And when the day comes, and we can receive Holy Communion together again as the Assembly of the Church, you will know more profoundly what it is to be a Christian.

You will know with assurance that you are the ones who bear His Name, not only

outwardly for the world to see, but inwardly where the truth of the Faith will drum in your heart with every beat.

You will know what it is to suffer for redemption, not for the randomness that we have come to know in this pandemic.

You will know that the Cross is the key that unlocks the gates of Paradise, and not an ancient instrument of death.

And you will know the same deep knowledge that Lazaros knew when he was called forth from his grave after four days. That God is the Source and Wellspring of life, and by His own Glorious Resurrection, He grants eternal life to us all.

May this Holy Week – this extraordinary Holy Week – be the most blessed of your life.

Καλή Δύναμη, καὶ Καλή Ἀνάσταση!
[*] Prokeimenon of Palm Sunday Matins.

[†] John 12:1

[‡] Zechariah 9.9.

[§] John 18:36.

[**] Genesis 49:11.

[††] John15:1.

[‡‡] John 19:15.

[§§] Cf. Matthew 27:32.
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