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His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America - Homily for the Fourth Sunday of Lent



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Homily for the Fourth Sunday of Lent

Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Cathedral

Richmond, Virginia

April 18, 2021

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am so delighted to be with you, in this magnificent Cathedral in Richmond, as we prepare to soon enter into the most sacred and solemn week of our faith. Today,

we celebrate one of the greatest Saints of the Church, Mary of Egypt, whose life was completely changed by her experience of Jerusalem and the power of the Holy Cross in the Church of the Anastasis. And we are called to be changed as well, by the same power of the Cross that we will witness not many days from now, and by the glory of the Resurrection.

As we ready ourselves for the mysteries of Holy Week, the Church invites us to enter into the mindset – and the timeframe – of this narrative of redemption. We are called to become part of the story, as the days proceed through the coming week that is commonly referred to as Κουφή Ἑβδομάδα, or the “Empty Week.” But it is not empty at all!

This sixth week of the Fast gets its name from the fact that it is the only week that does not contain Salutations to the Holy Virgin. Such is the impact of the Akathist Hymn! But in truth, the week, which should rightfully be known as the “Week of Palms,” is the beginning of the story.

We know that the coming Saturday is that of Lazarus, and Palm Sunday happens the day after. But we enter into the stream of salvation history starting tomorrow. We begin to travel – in real time – with the Lord. We join His final journey to Jerusalem, where He will die and rise from the dead for us and for our salvation. And as we commence this Week of Palms, we enter into the chronology of Holy Week as well.

Tomorrow, we will hear in the Matins Service:

Today, Christ made manifest the illness of Lazarus, while staying beyond the regions of the Jordan, as one Who knows all that will come to pass, saying: “This sickness is not unto death.” [*]

But on Tuesday evening, in the Vespers we hear:

Today, Lazarus has breathed his last, and Bethany laments for him... [†]

On Wednesday we hear:

Today, Lazarus has been buried, and his sisters chant lamentations... [‡]

On Thursday of this Week of Palms, we chant:

Lazarus has been dead for two days, and his sisters Martha and Mary have shed tears of grief for him, gazing upon the tombstone before them. [§]

And finally, on the Friday in which no Salutations are chanted,

we hear:

The Lord draws near: open your gates, O Bethany, and receive the Master with faith, for He has come to raise Lazarus from the tomb... [**]

* * *

Thus, my beloved Christians, we arrive at the Saturday of Lazarus, when our Lord manifested the truth of His Godhead and the destiny of the Resurrection for all humankind.

How, then, could anyone refer to this week as the “Empty Week?” Rather, it is a week when the story of our redemption engages in high gear, readying us for the trials of Holy Week.

Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday are a high point in the ministry of our Savior, but we know where the journey leads: to Gethsemane; the Trial; the Ridicule; the cruel lashes and crown of thorns; the Cross; death; and burial. But we also know that the raising of Lazarus is a foretaste of the glory that is to come.

My beloved faithful, may this coming week not be empty for any of us. May it be a week filled with anticipation, preparation and opportunity for all of us to enter into the stream of salvation history. And after traveling with the Lord through Holy Week, and dying with Him, may we also rise with Him in His glorious Pascha – marking the passing over from death unto life. Amen.

[*] Second Canon of the Ninth Ode; the Gospel of John, 11:4.

[†] Stichera Prosomoia.

[‡] Kathisma.

[§] Kathisma.

[**] Second Canon of the Ninth Ode.





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