

21/04/2021

Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden and All Scandinavia - Episcopal Encyclical for Palm Sunday 2021



Episcopal Encyclical for Palm Sunday 2021

Reverend Fathers,

Honorable Ambassadors, Consuls, Community Leaders, and Archons,

Chosen people of God,

Friends, benefactors, and supporters of the Holy Metropolis of Sweden,

My dear brethren, centuries have gone by since the Lord of glory triumphantly entered Jerusalem “on a donkey’s colt,” where He was greeted by the people with cries of “Hosanna,” only to be followed days later with another cry - “Crucify Him!”

The everyday people of that era welcomed Him triumphantly, however, the malice, hatred, and machinations of the Jews and Romans turned them into a crowd; a mindless mob. On Palm Sunday, the people hailed Him Who would be abandoned even by His disciples just days later, and left to stand silently before Pilate all alone. During the crucial hours leading up to the verdict condemning Him to be crucified, he was helpless, left without anyone to defend him.

The same thing occurs today as well, in many aspects of our ecclesiastical and

community life. It only takes days for the cheers of “Hosanna” to turn into shouts of “Crucify Him,” and sometimes just hours; particularly when we allow temptation to twist our thoughts and the truth of the events taking place around us. Today, it is not just the Jews and Romans of that era who stand as enemies of Christ, but many of our contemporaries, who oppose Him, betray Him, and use Him for their own purposes. These individuals have consciously or unconsciously strayed from the true Christian life and refuse to forgive “all things for the sake of the Resurrection.”

During a recent sermon, His Eminence Metropolitan Symeon of Phthiotis makes a pointed reference to the martyrdom of St. Gregory V on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of his death, noting: “This year marks 200 years from the Revolution of 1821 and it is a year that gives all of us Greeks, Orthodox Christians, Romioi (note: Greeks of the Roman Empire), and the entire Nation the opportunity to look back at our history and exercise some self-criticism; and most of all, to lay the correct foundations for the path we shall take from hereon in. We Christians in particular – and the supposedly devout Christians – who, as a general rule believe ourselves to be better patriots and more true patriots, have an opportunity to stand before the relic of St. Gregory V, Patriarch of Constantinople, come face to face with his saintly figure, and ask ourselves honorably and sincerely: If we were St. Gregory’s contemporaries, would we side with those who understood the political and pastoral position he adopted? Or might we perhaps be among those supposed genuine and authentic Christians who would bombard him with accusations of being a traitor to the faith and the homeland, and of being a sellout? Would we fill the internet and Facebook with fake accounts and anonymous comments rife with criticism, anathema, curses, complaints, and protests that St. Gregory is a ‘traitor’ or that he is ‘a part of the system’?”

St. Gregory V drew inspiration from Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross, like thousands of saints and confessors of our faith. The martyrs of the Church died for Christ because they believed in the Resurrection. The Passion and Resurrection of Christ served as a paradigm for them. They endured torture, as did He “who takes away the sin of the world.” Our life ought to be like this as well, my Brethren; sacrificial – primarily through the conscious choices that we make – and resemble Christ’s. We ought to follow Him on the Cross and in the Resurrection, and not become His crucifiers and deniers.

Did not the Apostles Luke and Cleopas do the same on the journey to Emmaus as they were misled by their thoughts? The Risen Christ was speaking to them and they did not realize that He was their very same Teacher and Savior. “But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened.” (Luke 24:21) They spoke in the past tense, saying “we were hoping,” when they were speaking with Christ on

the way to Emmaus; not in the present tense – “we are hoping.” They too were so quick to be swayed, and when they finally realized what had happened and repented, He “vanished from their sight.” (Luke 24:31)

My brothers and sisters, unfortunately, we live in an era where criticism, misrepresenting an opposing view or even the truth, “assassinating” anyone who is against us, who doesn’t side with us, whom we consider different and who cannot be contained within the confines of our narrow-minded viewpoint (instead of outstretched arms of our empathy) doesn’t cost a thing. We condemn people, scandalize consciences, and crucify our brethren instead of helping them bear their cross.

In this era, when the coronavirus pandemic is running its course all across our hampered planet, instead of praying for its quick containment, instead of coming face to face with the death that it has caused, we pass judgment on the righteous and wicked alike through misinformation being spread by certain so-called “social” media, in search of enemies.

The message of Christ’s sacrifice and His victory over death needs to also become a victory over our ego, over injustice, over the lies surrounding us or within us, and the start of a new life, the true life embodied by Christ, the crucifixion of our ego, our true resurrection, our common resurrection together with our brothers and sisters. Only in this way will we “praise the Risen Christ unto the ages.”

With many heartfelt paternal wishes for a blessed Easter,

+ Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden and All Scandinavia

