

#### 4.13.2025 Palm Sunday (St. Matthew 27:1-54)

As I was preparing for our celebration of Palm Sunday this morning, a passage from the book of Revelation came to mind. In this passage, St. John describes a vision of heaven that he was given to share with the Church. John writes, *“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen”* (Revelation 7:9-12).

Through the Revelation of St. John, we see that there will be a heavenly fulfillment of the historic event we celebrate today. This morning we bring to mind the great crowd that on a Sunday two thousand years ago, *“took branches of palm trees”* (John 12:13) and went out to welcome the Promised Messiah. As Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem, they cried out, *“Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest”* (Matthew 21:9). As we celebrate today, we look back to our Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and with palms in our hands sing out, *“All glory, laud, and honor, to thee Redeemer King,”* and as we sing we look forward to a day in heaven when we, with the elect from every nation, *from all tribes and peoples and languages... clothed in white robes, with palm branches* in our hands, will cry out with a loud voice, *Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!*

This glorious vision of heavenly worship, a vivid image of the Church triumphant glorifying God for the work of our redemption, fills our hearts and minds with wonder, gratitude, and indescribable joy. Yet, even as we consider the glory of our Lord’s triumphal entry into the holy city and the wonder of heavenly worship, the liturgy for Palm Sunday brings us back to earth by presenting us with a tragic account detailing the price God paid for our redemption, and describing another crowd, a crowd that didn’t worship

Him in heaven, a crowd that didn't welcome Him on earth. Instead, a crowd that cried out, "*Let Him be crucified!*" (Matthew 27:22).

It's often said that the crowd who so joyfully welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was the same crowd that just days later, on Good Friday, called out, "*Crucify Him... Crucify Him!*" (Matthew 27:22-23), and while it could be true that the multitude who welcomed our Lord turned on Him that quickly, we can't be certain. The biblical account doesn't draw a direct connection between these two crowds, but what is certain, according to St. Matthew, is that on both occasions the people were stirred up and persuaded by what you might call the cry of the day.

For example, when Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem, the cry of the day was "*Hosanna to the Son of David,*" and because of this glorious cry "*the whole city was stirred up, saying, Who is this?*" (Matthew 21:10). On Palm Sunday, the cry of the crowd stirred up the city to look on our Lord with affection, but just a few days later there was a different cry that came from the religious leaders. On Good Friday, we learn that "*the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude*" to act in an entirely different way. This crowd, that may have contained some who'd welcomed Jesus just days before, was moved by the cry of the day to demand that Pilate release a thief and murderer, and crucify our Lord. The man they asked for was Barabbas, whose name means son of the father, and the Man the crowd cried out to crucify was the true, only-begotten Son of the Father. The crowd chose the wrong son.

The influence of a crowd can persuade people to do great things, like welcoming our Lord with shouts of Hosanna, but crowds can also influence individuals to do terrible evil, such as shouting, "*Let Him be crucified!*" (Matthew 27:22), and these are just two examples of many. In the events of Holy Week, we also see the way pressure from the crowd influenced Pilate's decision to have Jesus beaten and crucified, and that St. Peter's fear of a crowd led him to deny our Lord three times.

These examples portray something we've all seen or experienced, the kind of herd mentality that leads people to simply conform with the crowd, instead of relying on our own individual God-given, Christ-centered, Spirit-led

conscience to direct our thoughts, words, and deeds, and these examples illustrate the importance of taking to heart the words of Scripture that call us to “*Test everything; hold fast to what is good*” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Instead of just conforming to the will of the crowd, Christians are called to search diligently for truth by carefully and prayerfully examining all things to be sure we are rooted and grounded, that we are holding fast, to what is true, good, and beautiful (Philippians 4:8).

While many people were led astray by the crowd, we know that among the multitudes gathered on Palm Sunday and Good Friday there were faithful people who were holding fast to the One who is Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. We see these people on the way to Calvary, at the foot of the Cross, and at the tomb. We see the Blessed Virgin Mary, who from the manger to the grave never left her Son. We see St. John, the beloved disciple, standing with her at the foot of the Cross. We see other faithful women there, Mary Magdalene, Mary of Clopas, and Salome, the mother of James and John. We see a criminal on a cross next to Jesus standing against the crowd and with our Lord. We see Joseph of Arimathea giving up his tomb, and with Nicodemus, reverently burying our Lord according to the sacred Jewish custom.

Scripture calls us to *test everything*, and in those faithful examples we recognize people who didn’t blindly follow either crowd, those that welcomed Him or those who called for His crucifixion. Instead, these saints put Jesus to the test, and having carefully examined the evidence and found Him to be trustworthy, they were then able to place their faith entirely in Him, and having done so, even in the face of great opposition they were then able to hold fast to the Truth, to stand boldly for Who they believe in, and to persevere in faith. Their example is written for us, and it leads to the question: Are you following the crowd, or have you put your faith in Christ to the test?

Jesus said, “*Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28). Have you found rest in Him? Jesus said, “*I will not leave you... I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age*” (John 14:18; Matthew 28:20). At a time when the world would consider you to be alone and without hope, did our Lord leave you, or was He there with you?

Jesus said, “*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*” (John 14:27). Have you experienced His peace which surpasses understanding?

St. John was given a vision of heaven to share with the Church in which he beheld “*a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!*” This is an inspired vision of heaven, and as we bring this image to mind it’s important to recognize that no saint in heaven blindly followed the crowd and arrived at this glorious day. Instead, the saints in heaven, *clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands*, are those who have worked out their Salvation with “*fear and trembling*” (Philippians 2:12), those who’ve tested everything, who’ve carefully examined the evidence, found our Lord to be trustworthy, and then by the grace of God placed their faith in Him entirely.

In a world filled with crowds to follow, test everything, and hold fast to the Truth, Goodness, and Beauty of God.