

We began this morning, this Palm Sunday with a kind of reenactment of The Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. We sang the triumphant hymn, we bore palms as they did on that day, and as the cross – the symbol of Our Lord – processed through our midst, we celebrated his victory, just as they did in Jerusalem when Our Lord entered the city 2,000 years ago.

And why was this occasion so momentous to the people of Jerusalem. Jesus had come into the city on several occasions prior during his active ministry. This was not the first time they had seen Jesus come into the city.

This occasion was unique, first because the news of the Resurrection of Lazarus had just spread through the region. Suddenly, this great teacher even healer and prophet had proved himself to be greater than any who had come before. This, now, must be the Messiah. Not only will he heal the sick and comfort poor and destitute, he can raise the dead. That is especially valuable for one who will lead an army. Healing lepers, granting sight to the blind, raising the crippled, all these are good and marvelous miracles, but they all seem fundamentally domestic. Raising the dead, now that is a military asset. This is a weaponizable power.

And so the people had begun to see Jesus as the promised Messiah. The Deliverer who was to triumph over their enemies and reestablish the people of God in the land of their fathers. This anticipation which had been growing in them was realized as Christ approached the city.

Our Lord came from the town of Bethany which was south of the city of Jerusalem. However, as he approached the city he traveled around the outside, not coming in by the South Gate, but going east and a little north of the city to the Mount of Olives. There he mounted the colt which was to carry him and descended the mount of Olives to enter in by the Eastern gate – the Golden Gate or Mercy's Gate. This was the gate through which the Messiah was to enter. Zechariah 14:4 states, "On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east". And Ezekiel chapter 44 states, "Then he brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary which looketh toward the east; and it was shut. Then said the Lord unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut. It is for the prince;" And so as Our Lord descends the Mount of Olives on the prophesied donkey, he was making clear allusion to the prophecies concerning the Messiah. The crowd which had gathered was made up in large part of those who had followed Jesus here. Their excitement mounted as they saw him path around the city and climb the Mount of Olives to enter the city. They knew what was happening, and they ran ahead into the city to tell all who were there how Jesus had approached the Eastern gate. And so they came out in Joy to welcome the Messiah. The long awaited deliverance was upon them. Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David!

However, we move so quickly in our service from these shouts of acclamation and joy to the cries of "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" In truth the quickness of our service is reflective of the speed in which the crowd is drawn into a wholesale rejectino of Christ. In the span of a week, they go from adoring disciples to raging mobs. This

swift turn around is the product disappointment. For the people all rejoice at the prospect of a new King, one who will defeat the Romans and re-establish their nation. Jesus seems to finally be the one to do it. However, over the course of the week to come Jesus would consistently turn down opportunities for conflict. Jesus would devote his time to teaching and spiritual admonishment. Jesus seemed more concerned with rebuking his people than challenging the Romans. Instead of a great general, he was a Rabbi. And why, then, had he come in by the Golden Gate riding on a donkey like a conquering King. He had implied he was to be the savior. Yet it seemed he was offering no salvation.

As we read the narrative of Christ's passion, it is valuable for us to recognize the scandal that it was. This was a great teacher, many thought he was the Messiah. The enemies of Our Lord did not dare to take him by day, because the crowds who followed him were still big enough that it would have caused a great disturbance. Had Jesus stayed amongst his disciples, in the midst of those who believed in Him, he would have been safe. Yet, because of the traitorous work of one of those dearest to Him, the authorities have an opportunity to come upon him when he is isolated and alone. These followers are awoken to the spectacle of the one who they believed to be the Messiah being beaten, mocked and scourged. He is dragged from the High Priest to Pilate to Herod and back to Pilate – tossed around by the men of power. He is condemned to die, rejected in favor of the murderer Barabbas. Barabbas was, at least, a man who was ready to fight to reestablish Israel. He was a revolutionary. Over the course of this ordeal one can imagine many who awoke that morning believing that Jesus was the Messiah, came to join in the disappointment of the hostile crowd. They began the day as small voices calling out in support of this Jesus, but as they saw the supposed Messiah tossed around by the Romans and their puppet king, they came to realize, as well, that this was no triumphant ruler. Many begin to join their voices to the jeering crowd. He claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God even, and look at him. As Our Lord marches toward Calvary, is nailed to the cross and finally dies, all the spiteful words hurled at him in his suffering seem to be proven true. He hangs amid thieves, esteemed lower than a murderer, helpless to stop his own death. What kind of Messiah was this? What was he supposed to accomplish by this ignoble end?

This approach to Jesus continues to tempt many today. There are those who follow Christ thinking he will bring them earthly happiness. Jesus will guarantee prosperity and health for his faithful followers, they are told. The greater your faith, the more blessed will be your life. Or perhaps, we are looking more for a sense of spiritual satisfaction. Perhaps, what we desire from God is to feel his love. As long as we feel connected to God, Jesus has fulfilled his promise. All of these ambitions ultimately lead to resentment and sorrow. For Christ, now as in the time of our Gospel, is not primarily concerned with earthly success or happiness. He certainly doesn't desire for his people to suffer, however, he is much more concerned with the state of our souls. So much so, that he seldom even mentions comfort. Our Lord came to save us, not from poverty or distress, but from our sins. He came, not to give us wealth, but to give us himself.

It is our calling to cling to the promises of Christ in faith. But what are those promises? That if we will take up our cross and follow the Lord he will give us the strength to continue to do so. As Father Chris discussed last week, taking up our cross means absolute and complete surrender, a death to self. The eternal reward which Our Lord has secured is so much better than anything we could receive in this life. The eternal reward will remain forever.

Our Lord, “humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.” This is the program of God’s grace. Humility is rewarded with glory. Suffering purchases exaltation. Death is swallowed up in eternal life.

The staggering humiliation of Our Lord must challenge his people. This is our example. We are almost certainly, called upon to be disappointments to the world. We will invariably be offering something that many will not want. Why should we be surprised that the teaching of the church is unacceptable to our culture? In the words of Jesus, “Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.” The humiliation and patience of Our Lord, is to be our model, as well.

This week, Holy week, is not just the culmination of the season of Lent. This week we are directed to consider Our Lord’s passion and death, we are called upon to acknowledge his suffering and pain, and ultimately to prepare ourselves for the true celebration of His victory which occurs one week from today. The great deliverance which caused the people to rejoice on Palm Sunday was actually accomplished. This Sunday is still building to something more grand. The central mystery of the Christian faith, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for our salvation, and by his resurrection defeated death. This is what we are celebrating with Palms and praise. This is what we have been preparing to celebrate all of Lent, all year, and all our lives. Hosanna to the King of Kings. His victory through humility is immanent. Let us humble ourselves with him so that we might be exalted with Him in glory.