

HOMILY ON PALM SUNDAY
(12/4/2020)

Our Lord Jesus Christ with His triumphant entry in Jerusalem, for the first time in His three-year long public ministry, presents Himself to the people as the Messiah, Whose coming to the world was foretold by the Prophets. As He enters Jerusalem, He is accompanied by the triumphant welcoming of the crowd, holding palm branches and cheering: "*Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!*" (John 12:13). When the Pharisees protested this, the Lord replied: "*I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out*" (Luke 19:40). And this did happen a short while later, when Jesus, nailed on the cross, was breathing His last breath, "*the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised*" (Matthew 27:50-52). Again also, after the Lord's Resurrection, "*an Angel of the Lord ... rolled back the stone from the entrance of the Tomb*" (Matthew 28:2) in order for the Myrrh-bearing women to be able to enter, and witness Christ's rising from the dead as God Almighty.

In this festive welcoming of the Lord in Jerusalem were also innocent children, who with a particular joy cried out "*Hosanna in the highest!*" (Matthew 21:9). Glory to God most High! All the Jews who had come from Galilee to celebrate the Passover also spoke enthusiastically about the miracles they had witnessed. There was no longer any doubt left among the people in the crowd that Jesus was the Messiah they were waiting centuries for. This is why they exclaimed: "*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord*" (Luke 19:38).

My brothers and sisters, if those people, who did not fully realize who our Lord Jesus Christ is (they saw Him as just an earthly king of the Jewish nation), welcomed the Lord to Jerusalem with such enthusiasm and acclaim, how much more should we glorify and give thanks to the King and Savior of our souls? He who travelled to Jerusalem to sacrifice Himself for our sake! Compared to the crowd in Jerusalem, we have received infinitely greater blessings from our Lord. The Prayer of Elevation of the Gifts (*Holy Anaphora*) in the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great makes reference to some of these blessings, saying that the Lord made known to us the true God and "*... He acquired us for Himself, as His chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. Having cleansed us by water and sanctified us with the Holy Spirit, He gave Himself as ransom to death in which we were held captive, sold under sin. Descending into Hades through the cross, that He might fill all things with Himself, He loosed the bonds of death.*" With His love and ultimate sacrifice, the Lord cleansed us from sin and set us free from the devil. He delivered us from the sufferings of eternal death, and raised us up to heaven, making us sharers in His eternal kingdom.

St. John Chrysostom movingly speaks of Jesus in this way, that from our Lord: *I am Father, I am brother, I am bridegroom, I am dwelling place, I am food, I am raiment, I am root, I am foundation, all whatsoever you will, I am. Be in need of nothing, I will be even a servant, for I came to minister, not to be ministered to; I am friend, and member, and head, and brother, and sister, and mother; I am all; only cling closely to me. I was poor for you, and a wanderer for you, on the cross for you, in the tomb for you, above I intercede for you to the Father; on earth I have come for your sake as an ambassador from my Father. You are all things to me, brother, and joint heir, and friend, and member. What more do you need?* [from Homily 76 on St. Matthew's Gospel 24:16-31 (Greek Patrology, vol. 12, p. 34)].

My brothers and sisters, since our Lord Jesus Christ did everything for us and is everything for us, let us do what the Church urges us to do, as spoken from the words of the Service of the Bridegroom this evening: "*Let us welcome Him with chants; for the Creator is coming to undertake the Cross ... He*

is doing everything in order to save humankind” (Kathisma, Holy Monday Matins Service). Let us welcome Him in our holy churches, with hymns of doxology and gratitude; “Let us glorify His unspeakable mercy.” Not only this evening, but let us be present at all of the services during Holy Week, to take part in all that He suffered for us, to remember His Holy Passion. May we do this with the humble thanksgiving that our Church calls us to: “Let us also come and with purified minds walk along with Him, be crucified with Him and die for Him as to the pleasures of life; so that we may live with Him ... in the heavenly Jerusalem”, (Holy Monday Vespers Service, Laudation Verses). Amen.