



My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday, we shall enter with our Lord into Jerusalem, joining with the joyful crowds as they wave palm branches, and as children sing, “*ὠσαννά, εὐλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἐν ὀνόματι Κυρίου, βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ. Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!*” (John 12:13) However, before we begin this joyous first day of Holy Week, we would do well to ask ourselves just what this hymn of praise means.

We know that the reason for the crowd’s behavior is the report of Jesus’ miraculous raising of Lazarus, which took place in the village of Bethany, not far from Jerusalem. Through His many miraculous healings during the previous three years, our Lord had demonstrated His Father’s gracious Will. Now, in raising Lazarus from the dead, He has prefigured His own Resurrection.

And of course, we also know that many of those welcoming Christ expect an earthly Messiah, one who will drive the Roman occupation from the land of Israel. Indeed, when He will appear before them in chains five days later, these same people who chanted for Him will exclaim to Pilate, “*Crucify Him!*” However, I ask us to look at the children, whose joyful recognition of Christ is dismissed by the Elders of the Temple. Christ Himself quotes Scripture: “*...[H]ave you never read, 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you have brought perfect praise?'*” Through their purity of mind and heart, these little ones can recognize that Jesus calls for a spiritual change of heart, rather the political revolution for which their elders hope. What then, do these faithful young people mean as they shout for the King of Israel, if not a literal king?

The key is to be found in the Greek word, *ὠσαννά*, which is taken from the Aramaic meaning “*Lord, save!*” The children who gratefully offer their tunics for the donkey to walk, understand that as the Messiah, the Lord has come to save us, not from any outside oppression, but from our own sinful and fallen natures. Palm Sunday is a day of great joy as we prepare for a week full of spiritual struggle, because we the Orthodox understand that through His entry into Jerusalem, the Son of God not only takes His final steps toward His voluntary and Life-saving Passion: the joy we experience as we surrender our souls to His saving work is present in every Liturgy, and in every Sacrament. We are not reenacting an event: we welcome Christ into the Jerusalem that

is our Sanctuary, understanding that He is present forever in our Churches, so long as we are willing to welcome Him into our hearts, and into our lives.

My Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I wish for each and every one of you a blessed Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday. Truly, we shall have opportunities to reflect on the withered fig tree, on the Parable of the Ten Maidens later in the week. Let us, for now, enjoy a brief respite, as we bask in the glorious light of our Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and that it promises for that Feast of Feasts, Pascha.

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta