

The Confessor's Tongue for April 17, A. D. 2011

Entrance of Our Lord into Jerusalem: Palm Sunday

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

Homily on Palm Sunday 1993

Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Today, in the day of Palms we stand in awe and amazement before what is happening in a way in which the Jews of Jerusalem could not meet Christ because they met Him imagining that He was the glorious king who would now take over all power, conquer and reject the heathen, - the Romans who were occupying their country, that He would re-establish a kingdom, an earthly kingdom of Israel. We know that He had not come for that, He had come to establish a Kingdom that will have no end, a Kingdom of eternity, and the Kingdom that was not open only to one nation but was open to all nations, and the Kingdom that was to be founded on the life and on the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God become the Son of man.

And Holy Week is from one end to another a time of tragic confusion. The Jews meet Christ at the gates of Jerusalem because they expect of Him a triumphant military leader, and He comes to serve, to wash the feet of His disciples, to give His life for the people but not to conquer by force, by power. And the same people who meet Him shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" in a few days will shout, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" because He has betrayed their expectations. They expected an earthly victory and what they see is a defeated king. They hate Him for the disappointment of all their hopes.

And this is not so alien to us in our days. How many are those people who have turned away in hatred from Christ because He has disappointed one hope or another. I remember a woman who had been a believer for all her life and whose grandson died, a little boy, and she said to me, "I don't believe in God anymore. How could He take my grandson?" And I said to her, "But you believed in God while thousands and thousands and millions of people died." And she looked at me and said, "Yes, but what did that do to me? I didn't care, they were not my children." This is something that happens to us in a small degree so often that we waver in our faith and in our faithfulness to God when something which we expect Him to do for us is not done, when He is not an obedient servant, when we proclaim our will, He does not say, "Amen," and does not do it. So we are not so alien from those who met Christ at the gates of Jerusalem and then turned away from Him.

But we are entering now in Holy Week. How can we face the events? I think we must enter into Holy Week not as observers, not reading the passages of the Gospel which are relevant, we must enter into Holy Week as though we were participants of the events, indeed read of them but then mix in the crowd that surrounds Christ and ask ourselves, Who am I in this crowd? Am I one of those who said,
A publication of St. Maximus Orthodox Church, 2026 West Oak, Denton, TX, 76201 (940) 565-6753

'Hosanna to the Son of David!?' And am I now on the fringe of saying, 'Crucify him?' Am I one of the disciples who were faithful until the moments of ultimate danger came upon them?.. You remember that in the Garden of Gethsemane three disciples had been singled out for Christ to support Him at the hour of His supreme agony, and they did not, they were tired, they were desponded and they fell asleep. Three times He came to them for support, three times they were away from Him.

We do not meet Christ in the same circumstances but we meet so many people who are in agony, not only dying physically, and that also happens to our friends, our relatives, people around us, but are in agony of terror one way or another. Are we there awake, alive, attentive to them, ready to help them out, and if we can't help, to be with them, to stand by them or do we fall asleep, that is, contract out, turn away, leave them in their agony, their fear, their misery? And again I am not speaking of Judas because no-one of us is aware of betraying Christ in such a way, but don't we betray Christ when we turn away from all His commandments? When He says, "I give you an example for you to follow," and we shake our heads and say, "No, I will simply follow the devices of my own heart." But think of Peter, apparently the strongest, the one who spoke time and again in the name of others. When it came to risking not his life, because no-one was about to kill him, to be rejected simply, he denied Christ three times.

What do we do when we are challenged in the same way, when we are in danger of being mocked and ridiculed and put aside by our friends or our acquaintances who shrug their shoulders and say, "A Christian? And you believe in that? And you believe that Christ was God, and you believe in His Gospel, and you are on His side?" How often? O, we don't say, "No, we are not," but do we say, "Yes, it is my glory, and if you want to crucify Him, if you want to reject Him, reject me too because I choose to stand by Him, I am His disciple, even if I am to be rejected, even if you don't let me into your house anymore."

And think of the crowd on Calvary. There were people who had been instrumental in His condemnation, they mocked Him, they had won their victory, so they thought at least. And then there were the soldiers, the soldiers who crucified Him. They had crucified innumerable other people, they were doing their job. It didn't matter to them whom they crucified. And yet Christ prayed for them, "Forgive them, Father, they don't know what they are doing." We are not being crucified physically, but do we say, "Forgive, Father, those who offend us, who humiliate us, who reject us, those who kill our joy and darken our life in us." Do we do that? No, we don't.

So we must recognise ourselves in them also.

And then there was a crowd of people who had poured out of the city to see a man die, the fierce curiosity that pushes so many of us to be curious when suffering, agony comes upon people. You will say, it doesn't happen? Ask yourself how you watch television and how eagerly, hungrily you look at the horrors that befall Somalia, the Sudan, Bosnia and every other country. Is it with a broken heart? Is it that you can not endure the horror and turn in prayer to God and then give, give, give generously all you can give for hunger and misery to be alleviated? Is it? No, we are the same people who came out on Calvary to see a man die. Curiosity, interest? Yes, alas.

And then there were those who had come with the hope that He will die because if He died on the cross, then they were free from this terrifying, horrible message He had brought that we must love one another to the point of being ready to die for each other. That message of the crucified, sacrificial love could be rejected once and for all if He who preached it died, and it was proved that He was a false prophet, a liar.

And then there were those who had come in the hope that He will come down from the cross, and then they could be believers without any risk, they would have joint the victorious party. Aren't we like that so often?

And then there is a point to which we hardly should dare turn our eyes - the Mother of the Incarnate Son of God, the Mother of Jesus silent, offering His death for the salvation of mankind, silent and dying with Him hour after hour, and the disciple who knew in a youthful way how to love his master, standing by in horror, seeing his Master die and the Mother in agony. Are we like this when we read the Gospel, are we like this when we see the agony of men around us?

Let us therefore enter in this Holy Week in order not to be observers of what happened then, let us enter into it mixed with the crowd and at every step ask ourselves, who am I in this crowd? Am I the Mother? Am I the disciple? Am I one of the crucifiers? And so forth. And then we will be able to meet the day of the Resurrection together with those to whom it was life and resurrection indeed, when despair had gone, new hope had come, God had conquered. Amen.

On Knowing One's Weakness

St. Isaac the Syrian, From Homily 8

Blessed is the man who knows his own weakness, because this knowledge becomes to him the foundation, the root, and the beginning of all goodness. For whenever a man learns and truly perceives his own weakness, at that moment he contracts his soul on every side from the laxity that dims knowledge, and he treasures up watchfulness in himself. But no one can perceive his own infirmity if he is not allowed to be tempted a little, either by things that oppress his body, or his soul. For then,

comparing his own weakness with God's help, he will straightway understand the greatness of the latter [God's help].

And again, whenever he looks over the multitude of his devisings, and his wakefulness, his abstinence, the sheltering, and the hedging about of his soul by which he hopes to find assurance for her, and yet sees that he has not obtained it, or again, if his heart has no calm because of his fear and trembling; then at that moment let him understand, and let him know that this fear of his heart shows and reflects that he is altogether in need of some other help. For the heart testifies inwardly, and reflects the lack of something by the fear which strikes and wrestles within it. And because of this, it is confounded, since it is not able to abide in a state of surety; for God's help, he says, is the help that saves. When a man knows that he is in need of Divine help, he makes many prayers. And by as much as he multiplies them, his heart is humbled, for there is no man who will not be humbled when he is making supplication and entreaty. 'A heart that is broken and humbled, God will not despise.' Therefore, as long as the heart is not humbled, it cannot cease from wandering; for humility collects the heart.

But when a man becomes humble, at once mercy encircles him, and then his heart is aware of Divine help, because it finds a certain power and assurance moving in itself. And when a man perceives the coming of Divine help, and that it is this which aids him, then at once his heart is filled with faith, and he understands from this that prayer is the refuge of help, a source of salvation, a treasury of assurance, a haven that rescues from the tempest, a light to those who are in darkness [etc...] From this time forward, he revels in the prayer of faith, his heart glistens with clear assurances, and does not continue in its former blindness and the mere speech of the tongue. When he thus perceives these things, he will acquire prayer in his soul like some treasures. And from his great gladness, the form of prayer is turned into shouts of thanksgiving. This is the very thing pronounced by one who has defined the form proper to each of our actions: 'Prayer is joy that sends up thanksgiving.' Here he speaks of the prayer that is achieved through the knowledge of God, that is, prayer that has been sent from God. For at that moment, a man does not pray with labor and weariness (as is the rest of his prayer, which is prayed before the experiencing of this grace), and because his heart is full of joy and wonder, it continually wells up gratitude while he silently bows the knees....

Upcoming Events 2011

18-23 April: Great & Holy Week
24 April: Holy Pascha: The Feast of Feasts!
7 May: Church Yard Sale for Hall Expansion
30 May: Memorial Day Picnic
28-31 July: Ten-Year Anniversary Celebration

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!