

Dearly beloved in Christ,

On Friday we ended the forty days of Lent. Yesterday and today our fasting is relaxed as we celebrate the twin feasts of Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday. Yesterday we joined with the crowd in Bethany as Jesus went to perform a miracle unlike any other we find in the Holy Scriptures. He raises a man, His friend Lazarus, who had been four days in the tomb. The prophet Elisha raised a child from the dead but that child had just died. No one had ever raised from the dead a body that had already begun to stink with decomposition. No one except Jesus.

It is because Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead that many people came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. It is because of this miracle that Jesus is greeted in triumph today when He enters the Holy City, Jerusalem. He comes now to Jerusalem to fulfill His own prophecy that we heard last Sunday: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again." (Mark 10:33-34)

Jesus enters into Jerusalem acclaimed by the people throwing down their clothes upon the ground, waving palm branches crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!" (John 12:13) The Lord's triumph of yesterday and today will be magnified in His own death and Resurrection.

Before we ever see the brilliance of the sun in the morning, the sky gradually shifts from darkness to light. Before we even catch a glimpse of the orb of the sun, the dawn is filled with its light. Even if we did not have a watch or a phone to check the time, we would know the sun is about to break the horizon by its light brightening the sky.

The light that precedes sunrise is an apt image for our celebrations of yesterday, Lazarus Saturday, and today, Palm Sunday. Both of these days have significance as wondrous events in the life of our Lord Jesus. They also point to even greater works on the horizon. Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead and his entry in triumph today is an image of what will happen in the week to come: how Jesus will die and be laid in a tomb and rise from the dead in the glory of His Resurrection.

We sang this morning, "By raising Lazarus from the dead before Thy passion, Thou didst confirm the universal resurrection, O Christ God." Lazarus' rising from the dead points to the Lord's Resurrection and our own Resurrection on the last day, in the same way the light of the dawn points to the rising of the sun that will follow. We must remember, Lazarus was brought back to the same life he had before. He eventually died again and was buried and he awaits the Resurrection on the last day when Jesus will come again. Our Lord Jesus Christ, however, when He dies and is buried, He returns in the glory of the Resurrection. His human body is transformed in glory. He no longer suffers hunger or thirst, pain nor sickness. The Lord's triumph of yesterday and today point to the radiant victory in the Resurrection that is to come in a week's time. These two days of celebration are but the light of the dawn which heralds the splendor of the sun itself, the beauty of the Resurrection of Christ.

Today we join the crowd that welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem with our palms and branches, carrying them in procession as the people carried them while Jesus rode upon the foal into the city. We will keep these blessed symbols of victory in our homes as a reminder of the triumph Jesus Christ wins through His death and resurrection. They are a reminder that we have been united to Christ Jesus through our baptism and so united to His death and resurrection as we sing today, "When we were buried with Thee in baptism, O Christ God, we were made worthy of eternal life by thy Resurrection." At home I have a large photo that was hand-painted, ninety-

five years ago, of my maternal great-grandfather in his casket. And in his hands he holds palm branches, the branches a real reminder that we who are baptized into Christ and live in Christ will join Him in the triumph of the Resurrection. “The Hebrew children greeted Thee with palms and branches, heralding Thy victorious Resurrection.”

As we enter Holy Week, the week of our Lord’s Passion, His suffering and death for us, here are words from Saint Andrew of Crete on how, besides holding our palms and willows, we may in the best way join ourselves to our Lord Jesus Christ: “Let us spread before (Jesus’) feet, not garments or soulless [olive] branches, which delight the eye for a few hours and then wither, but (let us spread before His feet) ourselves, clothed in His grace, or rather, clothed completely in Him. We who have been baptized into Christ must ourselves be the garments that we spread before Him. Now that the crimson stains of our sins have been washed away in the saving waters of baptism and we have become white as pure wool, let us present the Conqueror of Death, not with mere branches of palms but with the real rewards of His victory. Let our souls take the place of the welcoming branches as we join today in the children’s holy song: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the king of Israel.” (*Oratio 9, in ramos palmarum*)

Let us present ourselves to the Lord Jesus, our lives, all we are, by joining Him especially in the services of this Great and Holy Week of our salvation. Let us turn away from our sins and turn to face the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, Who is the Light of the World, and now comes to defeat death so that the glory of the Resurrection may be opened to us who serve Him. To Him, our Messiah and Lord be glory together with the Father and the Spirit, now and always. Amen.