

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

The Sunday next before Easter,
commonly called Palm Sunday¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the ninth Verse of the ninth Chapter of Zechariah.³

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth. As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto thee.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eleventh Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Mark.⁴

“And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage [**Beth-FAH-dgeh**] and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples, And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither. And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt? And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him. And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the

trees, and strawed [**STREWD**] them in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest. And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the center of gravity of all time and space. It is the bellybutton of the cosmos. Four thousand years ago, after Abraham defeated his enemies, Melchizedek [*mell-KIZZ-uh-deck*], King of Salem, brought out bread and wine and a blessing for Abraham. Melchizedek [*mell-KIZZ-uh-deck*] was priest of God Most High and King of Salem, King of Shalom, King of Peace, the mysterious foreshadowing and type of Christ.⁵ The name Jerusalem is “Jeru-Shalom,” Foundation of Peace.

Jerusalem is the jewel box of the Son of God. It is His City. Heaven itself is called the New Jerusalem, the Bride adorned for her husband, the Mother of us all. Jesus is the reigning Monarch of the universe, from Jerusalem outwards. On Palm Sunday, He goes forth as a Bridegroom out of His chamber, rejoicing as a giant to run His course. His course will take Him to Pilate’s judgment hall. It will be shown there that Jesus is the One in charge; He is on the offensive; He defines the issues; He is the judge over Pilate. The Holy Spirit is constantly at work to see that Jesus is the Judge of every relationship, every conversation, every decision, every person’s life, every nation’s life.

The royal procession of our King will lead to His Throne, the strangest throne in the world, a cross, on a hill, in the garbage dump outside the City, where criminals are executed. The Royal Procession which begins on Palm Sunday goes to the Upper Room and to Calvary and the Empty Tomb and the Great Forty Days and to the Holy of Holies

in Heaven.

This is the ultimate, cosmic reconnaissance mission. During the wilderness sojourn of the people of Israel, Moses sent twelve spies to reconnoiter the Promised Land. Joshua and Caleb came back with a positive report. Joshua—Yeshua—Jesus, is now completing the ultimate, cosmic reconnaissance mission. He will plumb the depths, for us. He will harrow hell.

When a road surface becomes too worn, it has to be scraped to its foundation before it is repaved. When you scramble eggs you are left with a pan that has to be soaked, scraped and scoured. Jesus' Royal Procession brings Him to the place, to the bellybutton of the universe, to the center of gravity, the center of all time and space, to the new axis of the new creation. There He will identify with and connect with all the sin and filth of the world, and scrape it out, from the bottom up.

He will plumb the depths. He will harrow hell. He does this for each one of us. Everyman's heart is Jerusalem. Everyman's heart is a jewel box for the Son of God. Everyman here is set for forgiving, cleaning, healing, renewing, and citizenship in the New Jerusalem, built from the rubble of the old. We have a saying, "Let's get to the bottom of this." Jesus is doing that with you right now. He is descending to the bottom of your barrel, the innermost recesses of your heart, the ultimate truth about yourself. There, within you, He is laying the foundation of Peace, the Jeru-Shalom.

Seventy years ago, a monk of Mt. Athos, St. Silouan, was given the grace to get to the bottom of his own heart, to plumb the depths, to go "re-con," to be a spiritual Navy Seal. For six months he endured a violent inner storm. He weathered that, to enter paschal joy. Then came a period of bewilderment. God's answer to his bewilderment was "Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not." This is a "saving spiritual formula in an epoch where both pride and despair reign supreme."⁶

This Holy Week we will plumb the depths with our Lord. During this Holy Week we must "not allow anything, from within or without, to

smother gratitude towards God's providence. Whatever happens, do not despair. Everything is possible to God, who is with us always, even when we descend to the valley of the shadow of death."⁷ "Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not." We know this from Psalm 139, "If I go down to hell, thou art there also...[,] if I say, Peradventure the darkness shall cover me; then shall my night be turned to day. Yea, the darkness is no darkness with thee, but the night is as clear as the day; the darkness and light to thee are both alike."

Descend to the lowest place, which the demons cannot do. They are always puffing themselves up. When you descend to the lowest place you are flying under their radar. They have no mental category for self-emptying and sacrifice. There, in the lowest place, the Holy Spirit shows us that Jesus is the Truth about ourselves. Jesus is the Truth of every situation. Through Him, in the Holy Spirit, Jerusalem and all creation, your heart and mine, can be returned to the Father.

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April 1, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the propers for Holy Communion on Palm Sunday, 2012.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xx (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Zechariah 9:9-12 (KJV).

⁴ St. Mark 11:1-11 (KJV).

⁵ Genesis 14:18.

⁶ *Sister Magdalen, Friends of Mt. Athos Annual Report* 50 (2001).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Bishop Ordinary, the Diocese of the Holy Cross; Rector, the Cathedral Church of the Epiphany, Columbia, SC.