

The reading is from the Holy Gospel according to St. John (12:1-18; Philippians 4:4-9)

+ In The Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit +

Back in 2009 President Obama came to Pittsburgh for the G20 summit. It was quite the production. Roads were paved overnight, cleanup crews came through in a whirl military helicopters buzzed overhead, traffic was rerouted, roads were closed, and neighborhoods were sectioned off. It was a big deal. And then the President came; flew in on Airforce One; took a limo with police cars, motorcades, secret service, weapons at the ready, and a big entourage. They drove to their meeting to discuss ideas for the people of the world. Some people shouted and cheered, others protested and rioted.

Kings enter their city with a big show, a big display of power, riding in on their warhorses, on cleaned up streets, displaying their weapons, accepting the people's praise, and they process and take up the seat of the throne where they rule the people and issue their edicts.

Now, today, we have all come out. Our King is entering the city, but He does so with the banner of "humility, poverty, and lowliness,"ⁱ and He enters mounted," not on a war horse, but "upon an ass without human pretensions at all."ⁱⁱ He displays not swords or spears,ⁱⁱⁱ but His very Body; His very person. His coming does not arouse fear,^{iv} but joy.

He comes not as an oppressor, but as the one who free us from the oppression of the devil, of sin, of death. He does not demand "taxes and tributes, and unpleasant and harmful labours of service,"^v but being the one whose burden is easy and whose yoke is light, He accepts the shouts and service of praise and worship: "Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The Son of David, the King of Israel!" And so He processes today, through our midst, to take up the seat of the true throne- the cross. And so we cheer, and we shout.

But there are many who protest and riot; not with banners, and structure fires, not by burning and looting, but they protest and riot in their hearts. These are the Pharisees. These are the worldly minded; these are the egotists, the passion driven. These are the devils. Their hearts burn with anger, wrapped up with banners of hate, hearts that have looted life right out of themselves.

Nevertheless, the Lord is at hand. Let us take up our palms and "make ourselves ready" to meet him "by our conduct..."^{vi} as St. Paul teaches throughout his letter to the Philippians. He says do not be anxious but with fervent prayer let your requests be made known to God. Meditate on the good; the things which we have learned, and received, and seen in the lives of the saints.

And these things are this: That the work of Christ is being completed in us (1:6), that we are partakers of grace (1:7), that to die is to gain; that we are to stand fast in the Orthodox faith, with one mind, struggling for the faith, and suffering for the Gospel; That we should not be afraid of adversaries-

terrorists, kidnappers, false teachers, our own thoughts, and the devil; that we are to be obedient to the call of working out our own salvation; to do everything without complaining and disputing (2:14-16).

And lastly Paul tells us, as he tells the Philippians, beware of heresy. He calls heretical beliefs about Christ and the Church “trash,” and those who teach it, “enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction” (3:18-19). Because doctrine matters. Because Orthodox doctrine is the medicine of the soul. Not protestant doctrine, not Roman, not secular, not the doctrine of other religions, but Orthodox doctrine. Because the point of true doctrine, the point of being united and of one mind is so that “...when He comes and to go in with Him and partake of the immortal food, and from thenceforth live eternally in the heavens.”^{vii} And so we do others a disservice when we pretend that everyone is the same, and that doctrine doesn’t matter.

Lastly, let us prepare ourselves like Mary, taking the costly ointment of our lives; let us pour out ourselves as a sacrifice unto to Christ. For as the house was filled with the fragrance of the very costly oil of spikenard, too is the Church to be filled with the costly fragrance of Christ death that has ransomed us from sin and death.

Let us prepare ourselves and not be like the crowd. The whole world came out to see Christ as He entered Jerusalem, but as He entered into His glory of the cross only the women were left. Let us be like those women, who follow Him to the cross, and who were the first to sing of His resurrection.

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ⁱ St. Gregory Palamas, *The Homilies*, p.111

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} St. Athanasius, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol.4, p.550

^{vii} Ibid.