



“Today the Word and coeternal Son of God the Father, Whose throne is the heaven and Whose footstool is the earth, humbles Himself and comes to Bethany, seated on a dumb beast, on a foal. Then the children of the Hebrews, holding branches in their hands, praise him saying: Hosanna in the highest; blessed is He Who comes, the King of Israel!”

Vespers for the Sunday of the Royal Entry of our Lord into Jerusalem

Flowery Sunday

The Royal Entry of Our Lord into Jerusalem

Father James A. Spontak

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.... The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Philippians 4:4-7

All of us look to the time of Passion Week with a certain amount of anticipation. The final scenes of the drama of salvation and of the life of Jesus are about to be reenacted before us again. We are blessed with the opportunity of participating in the whole cycle of the liturgical services of Passion Week, so richly satisfying and profoundly moving. We know, too, that the long-awaited Feast of feasts, that most solemn day, the Resurrection of our Lord, is at hand.

That is the spirit and mood of Flowery Sunday, the Feast of the Royal Entry of our Lord into Jerusalem. It carries the air of festivity, for it truly is a great feast of the Church. Yet woven throughout the liturgical services for this day is another theme, not in contrast, but rather giving clarity and definition to the exultant scene we are celebrating.

The anointing at Bethany juxtaposes the generous devotion of Mary, pouring out costly ointment for Jesus, with the grasping narrowness of Judas, already in anticipation of his betrayal. The anointing is for burial, and the plot to kill Jesus begins to unravel. It becomes obvious that this triumphal entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem carries far more significance than a momentary victory procession: "...for the King of angels rides now upon a foal, and He comes to smite His enemies with the Cross in His almighty power." (*Sessional Hymn at Matins*)

It is clear that Jesus is entering Jerusalem as King, acclaimed by joyful shouts of praise. At the same time, it is also clear that this public acknowledgement of Jesus is ushering in the dramatic sequence of agony, trial, and abandonment to the Father's will. Jesus' reign is established, and our redemption is assured.

We begin Passion Week with this perspective of faith: Jesus' power and reign are already in effect even in the darkest moments of all that we commemorate this week. It is an insight that we can then carry with us. The victory and lordship of Christ are ever present and manifest even as we face life's darkest aspects and moments. Encouraged by this faith, the above words from the Holy Apostle Paul's epistle might carry us through Great Week and our own hours of darkness, toward the dawning radiance of the Holy Resurrection.

SCRIPTURE READINGS: Philippians 4:4-9

John 12:1-18