

Palm Wednesday

Philip Hughes

"Dragged down by the weight of my sins, I now live in the tomb of thoughtlessness. In Your goodness, deliver me from it, O Lord."

Matins for Palm Wednesday: Sessional Hymn

The hymns for Matins of Palm Wednesday portray Lazarus as the representative of the entire human race. He has already been buried by his mourning relatives. In a similar manner, our souls like the deceased Lazarus have died again and again in our shallow lives. They are buried "in the tombs of thoughtlessness." When we deaden our souls through sin, we become a "sterile desert," which we ask Christ to make "fertile and fruitful" through the restored life of His grace as bestowed especially through the Holy Mystery of Reconciliation when we worthily and sincerely confess our sins. Without Christ, ours is the despair of one who is spiritually dead and hopeless.

In the *Genesis* paremia for this evening's Presanctified Divine Liturgy, Joseph comforts his brothers saying: "God has sent me before you in order to save your life." (*Genesis 45:5*) Just as Joseph was sent ahead in order to become the hope of his family's life, so does Christ represent the Hope of the buried Lazarus. Christ will come to Bethany to raise Lazarus, just as He can come to raise our souls from their tombs of selfishness and laziness. He is our Hope because He has been "sent before" us into death—into the abyss—and He has conquered it completely. We need not remain in our unnatural state of separation from God. Jesus Who is our Hope will raise us up from this life to the fulness of Life with Him.

Joseph wept aloud when he revealed himself to his brothers, whom he could have forsaken to a fate which they rightly deserved. Yet he cried for joy at their safety, at the chance to preserve their lives.

Jesus will also weep at the tomb of Lazarus. He knows that He will raise Lazarus, and yet He cries. He knows that we like Lazarus will also die and rise, yet He weeps. He has compassion and love for us who have betrayed Him just as the brothers of Joseph had done.

Martha and Mary deeply mourned their brother's death, but they also did a very practical thing: they sent for Jesus. Do we do the same thing when we know that our soul like Lazarus is about to be laid in the tomb? Do we call Jesus to come and protect it from the death of sin? Martha knew that if the Lord had been present, her brother would not have died. Have we that faith as exhibited by Martha?

SCRIPTURE READINGS: Isaiah 58:1-11

Genesis 43:26-31

Proverbs 21:23 - 22:4