

## SUNDAY SERMON FOR PALM SUNDAY 2015-04-04

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In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Happy Easter! Though this is not a Catholic or Protestant Church, we also celebrate Pascha, the passing over from death to life through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ today. For Orthodox Christians, today is Palm Sunday. Along with the Saturday of Lazarus, it forms a two day break between Great Lent and Holy Week and is in many ways, a pre-celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The seventh and final sign in John's Gospel is the raising of Lazarus who had been dead for four days. Jesus tells Martha, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." (John 11:25) He asks her if she believes. She says that she believes that at the Last Day, we will rise from the dead to eternal life. Jesus causes Lazarus' four-day-dead, decomposing and stinking body to miraculously be brought back to life.

The welcoming of Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior and King of Israel, the next day in the city of Jerusalem, is a direct result of the raising of Lazarus as well as all the previous miracles and teachings of Christ. So how is it that just a few days later, the Jews go from proclaiming, "*Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord.*" to "*Crucify Him!*"?

Both before and after Jesus, many attempts at revolution against the occupying Roman Army were attempted. The TV movie shown this week, **The Dove Keepers**, portrayed the final, futile attempt at a last stand at Masada.

The reality is that Jesus Christ did not come to be a political messiah but a spiritual messiah. He came not to become a temporal, earthly king of Israel, but an eternal spiritual king of your life and of all the world, of all the universe. Jesus didn't come proclaiming a prosperity gospel but a

gospel of humility, suffering and sacrifice. (Sarcastically) Who wants to sign up for that?

Given a choice between prosperity and suffering, we would all choose prosperity, right? But if we betray Christ and Christian morals and values to achieve prosperity, then we have no peace in this life, we bring suffering to ourselves and others and we have an eternity of suffering waiting for us. If we however choose to suffer with and for Christ in this life, we may yet be prosperous or we may suffer in this life, but we will have real peace and fellowship with God and His Saints both in this life and in eternal life.

NOW which would you choose? As I speak, Christians around the world are being persecuted and killed for their faith. Just this week, university students in northern Kenya were asked if they were Christians. If they admitted to belief in Christ, they were killed, shot dead on the spot. Also this week, it became politically incorrect to stand for the Restoration of Religious Freedom here in America. Governments, politicians, corporations, and even pastors and churches are running scared out of fear of being targeted by LGBTQ activists.

All of us are called to salvation through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. He suffered and died so that we can have fellowship with Him now and in eternal life. God loves all His children. He asks us to love Him and to love one another. He calls us to stand both for His Love AND for His Law. In his first letter the Beloved Apostle John says, *"He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."*

(2:4) God calls us to stand up for Him even when it's not convenient, not comfortable or not politically correct. He calls us not to deny our faith in Him, but counting the cost, to stand with and for Him.

This is a parish of roughly 200 families. Today there may be as many as 400 families present. Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Do you believe that

He died for you out of His great love for you to give you eternal life? Then what are you doing about it? Are you a supporting steward of this parish? Why not? Do you strive to tithe, to give 10 percent or more of your time, talent and treasure to God and His Holy Church? Or are you only at best a token giver? Are there always palm crosses given out when you come to church or does that happen only one in every 50 or so times you come to church? Do you think it matters to God? Do you think it will affect your eternal state? James, the oldest step-brother of our Lord writes, *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."* (2:6)

Christ said, *"Take up your cross, deny yourself and follow me."* (Luke 9:23) Unfortunately, far too many of us instead choose amoral prosperity, popularity and political correctness in this life rather than Christian suffering. Far too many of us are in the world and of the world rather than in the world but NOT of the world. As Christians, we should be of God and not of this world. (John 8:23; Romans 12:2) God gave us free will. We choose how we will respond to His Gospel – to Christ Crucified and Resurrected.

God IS merciful but He is also just. The fact that you are sitting here today probably means that you think you are getting into heaven when you die. Most of you are probably right, you probably will. I want you to consider however a picture of heaven as an exclusive night club that is open 24/7. Because you have accepted Jesus' sacrifice for you, the ridiculously exorbitant price to get in has been paid for you. So the bouncer lets you into Club Heaven. This is a club with many levels however. There is not just one VIP room, but many levels of VIP rooms. I don't know about you, but I want to get into the top level, to personally party with Jesus and the Saints forever. I don't just want to get a glimpse of Jesus from afar, from way across the other far end of the club. I want to

sit in His presence and hang on His every word, feeling His peace and love powerfully wash over me forever.

Today, each of us has a choice. God has paid the ultimate price for all of us. What are you going to do about it? Will you invite Jesus in to be King of your life or will you just kind of keep Him on the side, just in case you need Him some day? The truth is you and I need Him every moment of every day. He wants to come into your mind, heart, soul and body to fill you with His peace, His mercy and His love. God is a gentleman however. He stands at the door and knocks (knocking on the pulpit) on the door of your life, waiting for you to open the door and invite Him in.

The shortest passage in the English Bible comes from yesterday's Gospel reading. Just before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, we read in John 11:35 two words, "*Jesus wept.*" Jesus weeps for our fallen state and for us when we reject Him and choose to be spiritually dead. We will weep eternally for that choice.

I hope and pray that you will open the door, and allow Jesus Christ to King, the King of your life. Then together we can make this church, this community, this nation and this world more like heaven and less like hell for all God's children. Together we can party forever in the ethereal VIP lounge of Club Heaven. The priceless cover charge has already been paid. Jesus paid the price of admission with His Blood on the Cross. I hope and pray that you will join me, that you will take up your cross and together we can follow Jesus in this life and into eternal life as well.

To God be the glory, now and forever, and to the ages of ages, Amen.