

“Brethren, rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. 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.”

That is from this morning's epistle reading. St. Paul was writing from prison, where most men would feel dejected and abandoned by God. St. Paul was telling the Philippians to rejoice, God will take care of them. God is with me here in prison as he is with you. We were to let on men know their patients and their tolerance in their persecution. That no matter how the world treated them, they were still to rejoice. When men attack them, bear it in patience. This is not just for the men and women at Philippi but also for us today. How often do you feel that the world is against us? How often do you feel abandoned by God? How does Paul tell us to handle these situations? He tells us to pray and supplicate God making known our needs to Him. But, there is one other thing that Paul tells us we must do. He tells his to make these requests, these supplications with thanksgiving. He doesn't tell us to wait until after the prayer requests were answered. He tells us to make the request with thanksgiving at the same time. When you're praying to God don't try to tell God what to do. Tell Him your needs and be thankful about hearing your prayer and trusting that God will answer your prayers in the manner that is best for you, although the answer may not be what we want. And when we do this, St. Paul promises as to the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. If we trust God in all things we will be at peace.

St. Paul continues: "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, these do; and the God of peace will be with you.”

In the time of hardship and betrayal, the easy thing is to focus on the failures and sins of others and on the brutality of life, on the unfairness and on the pain. This is not the way that our Lord wants us to live. Rather we should focus on whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. We are to focus on Holy things. St. Paul is telling the Philippians to focus on the things that he has taught them that they have seen in him and then to do these things. We, must follow the same example imitate the Saints. Saints have served our Lord faithfully and with total trust. By following their example, we too can serve our Lord faithfully and enter into His kingdom when the time comes for us to leave this world.

Today we celebrate the Entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem. Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany which was the home town of Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary. Remember that yesterday we celebrated the raising of Lazarus from the dead by Jesus. Lazarus had, been dead for four days, and yet Jesus had brought him back to life.

They made Jesus a supper and Martha served the meal while her brother Lazarus sat at the table with Jesus. We know that this dinner was at Martha's house since she served the meal. Perhaps

the meal was given as a way of saying thank you to Jesus for raising Lazarus from the dead.

The usual practice at such a feast was to anoint the head of the guests with a bit of oil upon their arrival. Apparently, this had not been done, since while Jesus ate the meal Mary, Martha's sister took a pound of very costly oil, and anointed the head of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair. The oil cost 300 denarii, which was 300 days wages for the common laborer. The people were surprised to see, what to many was a total waste of money, being poured onto Jesus. It was not just the expense of the oil that shocked everyone, Mary had removed her veil, and let down her hair, and wiped his feet with her hair. In those days this was unheard of. Respectable women never went unveiled, even in their own homes.

In John's Gospel, it was Judas Iscariot that raised this concern, but in the other Gospels, it was all the disciples. Judas argued that the money could have been given to the poor. John tells us the Judas didn't care about giving the money to the poor, but that he was a thief and stole from the common purse.

Greedy for money, Judas criticizes Mary's way of showing honor to Christ. But Judas really means is "why did you not offer Jesus the money instead of Myrrh, so that I could steal it?" Although the Lord knew that Judas' question masked his intention to steal, he does not upbraid him. Jesus wanted to avoid shaming Judas, in order to teach us to be patient and long-suffering with such people. But he does indirectly reproach Judas for his treachery and willingness to betray his Master for money. He speaks about his own burial in order to stir Judas' unfeeling heart and sting his conscience. He also reminds Judas that "the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always." By this He means: I will be gone shortly, since you're plotting will bring about my death. If you find My person vexing and the honor shown to Me rankles you, wait a little: you will be free of Me. And then the true reason you want to sell the myrrh will become apparent to all.

Now a crowd of the Jews began to gather, having learned that Jesus was there along with Lazarus. They wanted to see, both this man who was raised from the dead, and the man who had raised him from the dead. We may find it perplexing when John tells us that the chief priests deliberated as to how to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus. The chief priests knew that it was on account of Lazarus that many were believing in Jesus. But if you will recall, the chief priests also persecuted the disciples of Jesus after He had been crucified.

The next day Jesus began to head into Jerusalem. Bethany was only a couple of miles from Jerusalem. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, crowds gathered on the road that he was on and, cheering, greeted him like a king entering the city after a military victory. The crowds had heard about Jesus, about his powerful teaching and his miracles, especially the raising of Lazarus from the dead. They cried out "Hosanna in the highest," a shout of praise and a plea for salvation. "Save us, Lord!"

For years, for many generations, these people had languished under the heavy boot of Roman occupation and oppression. They are weary of high taxes, soldiers in their streets, and the

constant threat of violence. The people are tired and weary and hungry, and they wanted freedom. But how do they obtain it.

The obvious answer is to go out and fight for it. This was what the crowds in Jerusalem wanted from Jesus as he traveled on that carpet of palm branches and the clothes off their backs (Mark 11:8). Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah “Fear not, daughter of Zion: Behold, our King is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt.”

In their eyes, Jesus was the perfect leader for a righteous rebellion. Surely God’s Anointed One could raise up an army and restore the Kingdom of Israel. After all, if Jesus had the power to raise Lazarus from the dead, he would be invincible in the face of Roman legions. If Jesus was truly God’s anointed one, then he would be invincible in battle. The crowds wanted the kind of freedom that you win with the spear, the chariot, and the sword.

The crowd was hungry for power, and they hoped that Jesus would lead them to victory in an epic battle that would change their world.

On a certain level, the crowd was right. They were at the threshold of a great battle that would change everything—a battle that would grant freedom to the oppressed, and vanquish the foe. However, the army that Jesus came to fight was not flesh and blood; it was, as St. Paul says, a battle against the “spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Eph 6:12).

Today, on Palm Sunday, we have fasted forty days, we are hungry, and if ever we face temptation from Satan, it is now. We face the temptation to gratify ourselves with worldly delights.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem, he faces these temptations as never before—all of those people cheering, crying out “Hosanna!,” just begging him to be their worldly general, their commander, their emperor. Yet, Christ refuses to be the earthly king that the people demanded. Instead he will be revealed as a kind of king that the world has never seen, a perfect king, a heavenly king, a humble king, crowned with thorns, robed in the purple of mockery, and enthroned on the Cross. Though Christ enters Jerusalem and is enveloped in a firestorm of temptation, he keeps his eyes on the Cross. This is the victory of Palm Sunday.

And today Jesus Christ enters into the Jerusalem of *our hearts* to lead *us* to victory. Today, Christ fills *us* with his power, his strength, and his resolve to overcome the temptation to worldly power. For “the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matt 20:28)

Today we cry out “Hosanna in the highest!,” for Christ vanquishes the powers of evil, and through his perfect sacrifice on the Cross we are liberated from the oppressive desire for worldly power. Christ leads us to the unexpected victory in which the King lays down his own life for the salvation of all. In dying, the true majesty and power of the Lord is perfectly revealed and the powers of hell are vanquished. Following Christ, we lay down our lives as he did: for our brothers and sisters, our neighbor, and even our enemies. Today we cry out “Hosanna in the highest!” as we follow

our Lord to his voluntary passion and death on the Cross.

Once more let us ask ourselves who we are and where we stand, what would be our position in this crowd. Do we stand with hope or despair, or what? And if we stand with indifference, we too are part of that terrifying crowd that surrounded Christ, shuffling, listening, and then going away; as we shall go away from church at the end of today's services. The Crucifix will be standing here on Thursday and we shall be reading the Gospel about the Cross, the Crucifixion and death – and then what will happen? The Cross will remain standing, but we shall go away for a rest, go home to have supper, to sleep, to prepare for the fatigues of the next day. And during this time Christ is on the Cross, Christ is in the tomb. Let us think about this, and if we are incapable of doing anything, let us at least realize who we are and where we stand, and at the final hour turn to Christ with the cry, the appeal of the thief, "Remember me, Lord, in Thy Kingdom."