

“We ride with Jesus the Christ”.

Based on Matthew 21:1-11 & Philippians 2:5-11

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

“Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’” The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Today is Palm Sunday. The last Sunday before the Easter. The day when we remember Jesus’ triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. This one seems different, not like the ones which I can remember...

So, how are you going, Brothers and Sisters? How was your week? How do you feel seeing the world changing right before our eyes?

A fellow pastor once said that Australians like to keep themselves busy and entertained so that they don’t need to face deep and existential questions. So that they can laugh and play and have fun ... no worries, mate!

I think he was spot on. We have been living like in a big and noisy house; so many distractions, so many things happening, you need to be everywhere, participate everywhere, have fun with everyone, and suddenly...

Everything has gone silent. Everything has stopped... This silence... it may feel so uncomfortable. Our usual distractions are gone. Where to look? Who to listen to? What to think? What to expect?

Out of blue comes uncertainty... fear... anxiety... this is what seems to be spreading much faster than any virus. What will tomorrow bring? When will the old normal be back? Will it be back? What if not? What will change? How long are we going to spend in this so-called fluid situation?

Our eyes are rushing around, where to look for security? Our ears are cocking at every noise – what is happening? Who has any words of wisdom and comfort? Where will my help come from?

This is where we need to turn to our today's readings from the Holy Scriptures. I have to admit that it seems that during the last few weeks the words of the Lord have come alive. It feels like our God is speaking to us louder than ever. Perhaps it is because there is no noise of our busyness... the world stands still.

It has always been good to be a Christian, for it is good to know the truth, it is good to know who you are and who God is, it is good to know what your ultimate destination is, and so on. And it is good to be on the winning team... but it is especially good in times like these.

Blessed you are if you already know the true God as you Father in heaven. Blessed you are if you know His Son Jesus Christ as your brother. If not, this is the time, this is the day of salvation, He invites you, He stretches His hand to welcome you. Accept it and hold fast to it, and He will never let you down.

What can we learn from today's readings? What words of wisdom and encouragement the Holy Spirit speaks to us? Our today's readings speak about God's commitment and His power. His commitment and His power. They remind us loudly and clearly where we can find peace and security regardless of what is happening around us.

We are in this privileged situation, where we have God's own revelation available to us and we can – so to speak – go back in time and see what our God is willing to do for us, how extraordinary His commitment to us is.

Let's see and be encouraged. Paul wrote in the letter to Philippians: "Jesus Christ, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

What is our God ready to do for us? A long time ago there was this garden, where we lived in the very presence of the holy God. We were made just a little

lower than the heavenly beings, we were crowned with glory and honour. We were given dominion over the works of His hands.” (See Psalm 8.)

But that wasn't enough. Humanity wanted to become equal with God, to elevate ourselves, to become wise on our own, to be more. It didn't work. Instead of raising up came fall. Instead of desired wisdom, foolishness. Instead of more, much, much less. That summarizes also our situation.

We want to be self-sufficient, autonomous, independent from our Creator by all means. We don't want to listen to Him, we want to wise on our own, and we hope that thus we will be something more, but... in fact, that's why we are far less than we could be.

What is our God ready to do for us? Right after we have caused this cosmic mess, the eternal Son came looking for us: “Where are you?” And despite what we had done He didn't hesitate to announce the first Gospel promise.

That He Himself will take all responsibility for what the rebellious and foolish humanity has done, and the He Himself will fix what we have broken. And, yes, that the cost will be great... nothing less than His innocent sufferings and death.

Centuries went, went millennia and our God kept repeating His promise, He kept calling us back to Himself. We kept testing His patience, we kept moving further and further away from Him, inventing new ways how to neglect and hurt Him, but He just kept repeating His promise: “I will bring you back home!”

Then, in the fullness of time, the eternal Son of God emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” What is our God ready to do for us?

Just listen and be comforted. Jesus knew why He was born. He kept teaching it to His disciples, but there was no understanding among them and even less support for what Jesus had to undertake. Some tried to talk Him out of it.

“O Jesus, may it never happen to you!” Some had very different ideas of what Jesus' kingship will mean. They were arguing among themselves who will get to sit at His right and who at His left when Jesus establishes His kingdom.

Jesus kept fore-telling them that He needs to go to Jerusalem, where He will be betrayed, suffer and will be crucified. No one had ears to hear it. Came that Palm Sunday. The Triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. Triumphal...

In which way? How did Jesus feel? His ride of choice was a donkey. Not exactly the king's ride. As He was approaching Jerusalem, crowds were shouting “Hosanna to the Son of David!” Excitement and joy were in the air...

It appeared that the whole world had gone after Him. But just a few days later the crowds will be shouting even louder. Very different words: “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Jesus had come to the holy city to be glorified, as He Himself repeatedly was teaching, – to be glorified and lifted up.

But what He had in mind was very different from what His disciples and followers envisioned. His throne will not be made from ivory and gold and precious stones. His throne will be made from wood and iron – a simple wooden cross with iron nails, coloured red with His precious blood.

On the night before that happened, Jesus prayed, sweating blood in the garden of Gethsemane, He knew what was coming, that finally He will fulfill the promise given to our first parents, that we will endure the cross for our sake. That much about His commitment to us. This is what He is ready to do for us.

But... and that would be a logical question to ask: “Fine, He is committed to us, there is no doubt about that. But, has He actually gotten enough power to help us and to protect us?” Let’s go back to Paul’s letter to Philippians once more, for that was the second thing that this letter highlighter for us – Jesus’ power.

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

These verses contain more than at first meets the eye. Seven centuries before Jesus, the Holy Spirit spoke to us through Isaiah the prophet saying: “For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens, (He is God!), who formed the earth and made it. [...] Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. [...] “To me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear allegiance.” (Is 45:22-23).

Did you hear this? Did you get what the Holy Spirit is telling us? Jesus Christ, the One, who is so committed to us, He is the same eternal God who created the heavens and the earth, and now He has received all the authority and power.

Besides, when the Bible encourages us and speaks about Jesus’ power, it doesn’t speak about some kind of theoretical knowledge “our God is all-mighty God”. It is true, but there is so much more for God’s chosen people. For you...

This all-mighty God is with us. He comes and dwells with you. Two millennia ago, Jesus left His divine glory to become one of us. Now He comes and makes home with us. He emptied Himself and humbled Himself and was highly exalted. Now this Jesus, to whom all authority is given, He comes to you and fills you with His Spirit and grants you His presence and protection.

Jesus doesn't just instruct us how to become fearless and courageous in situations like this. Instead, He unites us with Himself, the fearless One. He shelters you and stands with you wherever you are. For He knows us too well.

He knows what sort of creatures we are. He knows that we may get arrogant and boastful when we feel that we are in control. And He also knows that we may become fearful and weak when surrounded by the unknown.

But He is fearless, and He is all powerful and He is all in with His commitment to you. The entire history of humanity, from the very beginning till the very end, as recorded in the Scriptures, testifies about His loyalty to you.

He is the Keeper of all His promises. He is the Lord of the history and the Lord of the future. The only One who not only was committed to you till death, but who also has power to give to you a new life with Him in the age to come.

See, it is good to be Christian. Then you don't need to wonder where to look, who to listen, where to find security and peace, wisdom and comfort. For it is all here, in one person of our Master and our Brother Jesus Christ.

Thus, on this Palm Sunday we too may ride into the future with our heads high lifted up, for we are not alone, we ride with Jesus the Christ.

Amen.