

## **“You will be misunderstood” John 12:12-16**

**“The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!” His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.”**

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

Today is Palm Sunday. When we remember Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Triumphal... Was it really triumphal? I am not so sure. Perhaps it was, if you saw it as an observer. But how did it look from Jesus’ perspective?

What do you think, is 30 years a long time? I guess it depends. Not that long if you are the eternal God, the very Creator of time. But it can be quite long even for the eternal God, if that time is spent living as a human being in the first century under Roman rule.

And not just somehow spent, but spent waiting for that hour when He will accomplish His mission. That is, when He will suffer and be executed on the cross. Not because of what He had done, but because of what we have done. I wonder how many crucifixions Jesus had seen in His life, as they were way too common during that time.

The entire life of Jesus was leading up towards this one week, towards these last few days that He will spend in Jerusalem. To those last few hours that changed the course of the entire history of humanity forever.

Jesus had been teaching to those who listened to Him, that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer at the hands of Jewish leaders and be killed. Not the message that you would expect from a young and rapidly raising Rabbi. But Jesus had been fore-telling it again and again. Even His opponents had heard it well.

Finally, that hour had drawn near on that Palm Sunday as Jesus was heading to Jerusalem, to the last destination in His journey, to be betrayed, suffer and be killed, and to complete the mission that He had volunteered for since the very beginning.

Would you still describe His arrival as triumphal? Just to remind you what the context of Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem was. For quite a while Jesus had been teaching and preaching the Good News about the Kingdom of God, speaking with authority, declaring openly also why He had come. However, it seems that no one was able to fully understand Him.

Jesus had shown compassion towards people. So often, contrary to His intentions, and in a way even obstructing His main mission, He couldn’t help by keep helping people. So many had been relieved from their sufferings, restored.

People from everywhere were streaming to Jesus, not so much to hear the Gospel, but bringing to Him their physically and mentally sick, demon possessed. Whenever Jesus looked at them, whenever He saw their desperation and pain, He had compassion on

them, He helped them emptying Himself for them. And if that was not a miraculous enough display of His supernatural power, occasionally Jesus did things which caused people to tremble in fear. Just remember rebuking the storm, or walking on the water during night, or raising the dead. How shocked were those who witnessed it.

Just a few days ago Jesus had raised from the dead His dear friend Lazarus, who had been dead for four days. Lazarus lived only a short distance from Jerusalem. Many saw it happening. Many had also come from Jerusalem to verify with their own eyes that Lazarus, indeed, was raised. They had believed that Jesus was someone... very special.

Even Jewish leaders were well aware of this. No one could deny that Jesus was acting with an extraordinary power. People's expectations kept growing. As a nation that had lost its freedom, they were longing for the former glory to be restored.

They were waiting for the Messiah, the Savior, promised by their God, to come and to deliver them from all their enemies. The time was right. The Holy Scripture told so. And no one had ever done things like Jesus had. Could He be the One?

And now He is arriving in Jerusalem, accompanied by the crowds of His disciples and followers, clothes and branches are spontaneously spread on the road before Him and excited crowds keep shouting: **"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"**

Something indescribable is in the air. Even those among the leaders who had plotted to capture and murder Jesus, now seeing Him openly arriving in Jerusalem could only say to one another. **"We are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."**

If only... How could Jesus feel amidst this? Triumphant? I do not know. How easy is it when you are continually misunderstood? Being cheered with shouts of joy when you ride to your own execution. How easy is it to carry such a burden alone, when there is no one to share it with? For no one understands, no one! And no one can help.

Jesus was coming to deliver Himself in the hands of His adversaries, to give His life as a ransom for many. But the crowds who accompanied Him failed to understand it, or even to recognize who Jesus truly was. When asked: "Who is this?" The crowds said: **"This is ... the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."**

Jesus, just a prophet from Galilee.

The crowds who cheered for Jesus and shouted out of joy, they were hoping that their powerful Champion had arrived, finally He will just blast all their enemies away, and will bring back that golden age for their nation.

Then everyone would live in prosperity, healthy and well fed, dwelling securely in their land, happily ever after... just as Isaiah so beautifully had prophesied. Isn't that what we all desire? Is not that what people often expect from God? Is not that what God is supposed to give to all His people?

Jesus was so misunderstood. His arrival was misunderstood. His mission was so misunderstood. The same situation continues even today. People misunderstand who

Jesus is. People misunderstand what Christianity is about and what it means to be a Christian. Even many churches get it wrong. What about us?

Jesus didn't come to assume some earthly power and to wipe out those who opposed Him, or to create a paradise on earth. And we, as His body, His Church, who are left to continue God's mission, we should be clear about what this mission is.

Jesus came to give up His life not only for His friends, who would all abandon Him, but also for His enemies, who were ever present. Except, He didn't see them as enemies. Neither Caiaphas the high priest, nor Pilate the governor, nor Herod the tetrarch, nor the soldiers who beat Him and mocked Him.

Not even those executioners who nailed His hands and feet to the cross. Jesus knew the true enemies – sin, death and devil. He knew that those people were not His enemies, rather pitiable captives of sin and devil. He had pity on them.

He prayed for everyone: **"Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do."** He laid down His life for every one of them. For those who shouted: "Crucify him!" For those who drove the nails through His limbs. For me. For you. And for the person who has hurt you the most too.

We are His Church, His followers, we too are called to love and to care for all people. We have no human enemies whom we need to overpower. We only have fellow sinners, for whom we are to pray, so that one day we may cheer and shout for joy as they too arrive in New Heavens and New Earth, restored and beautiful.

Jesus hadn't come to ensure that everyone is healthy and well-fed either. Yes, He had compassion on people, He helped them, He even provided for them miraculously, but that was not why He came. If anything, these things often distracted people from hearing Jesus' message and understanding His true mission.

We too, as Jesus disciples, we are to care for everyone whom our Father has placed in our lives. We are to serve them and help them in all their bodily needs. Sure. May the Lord help us! But that is not the main mission for us as the Church.

The Son of God came to deliver us from the power of Satan and to transfer us in His Kingdom. He came to reconcile us with the Father and bring us into His family. He came to conquer our ultimate enemy – death, and give us the most precious gift, eternal life with Him in restored heavens and earth. That was His mission.

And we as the body of Christ are here to continue His mission. Now Jesus works through us. He sends us with the Good News to tell everyone what He has done. We should be in awe and amazed by what a great privilege is entrusted to us.

But we could object – how can we deliver anyone from the power of Satan or transfer them into God's Kingdom? How can we reconcile anyone with God? How can we give to anyone eternal life? We just do not have such power.

You are right, but... as you speak the message from Jesus, as you invite people to return to the true God, your words are not your words only. Not anymore. It is the Son of God Himself and the Holy Spirit who accompany you.

This is the amazing miracle of how the Triune God continues to work through us – whenever you share the Gospel message, the Holy Spirit partners with you in changing people's hearts, in rescuing them from their spiritual death, in giving them new life, in bringing them into God's family. You are part and parcel of His mission!

Just think about it! It is Jesus Himself who speaks through us, His messengers, and He has all the power in heavens and on earth, and His words always accomplish what they are sent to do, even when spoken by us. This is what we are here to do, to participate in God's grand rescue mission, building His Kingdom.

We too are often misunderstood. It is no wonder that Christians share the fate and rejection that Jesus did. But we are here to offer to the dying and broken, to the foolish and arrogant world something unique, something infinitely precious that every human being desperately needs – free gifts of our gracious God. Those gifts that Jesus has obtained for us through His death and resurrection – forgiveness and eternal life.

We live in this world, but the things of the world are not our ultimate concern. Our hope is set on the world to come. On our life with Jesus, in New Heavens and New Earth, where there will be no more injustice, no jealousy, no sufferings, no betrayals, no gossip, no pride, no crying, no death... but where instead God's own presence among us will satisfy all the longings of our hearts.

Jesus came to Jerusalem so misunderstood, and was so rejected. We often are misunderstood and rejected. But we can rejoice and take courage following the example of our Master. We too are called to humble ourselves, to have the mind of Jesus, to consider others as more significant than ourselves.

For this is what He did, Jesus considered you as more important than Himself. We are not to fight for our rights, but to love and pray even for our enemies. We are to give up our lives, so that others may live. We are to sacrifice ourselves serving others.

We are to share the life-giving Gospel, even if we are hated for Jesus' name's sake. Sure, we can't do it on our own. We don't have such power. We can only do it with the help of the Triune God as He who walks with us, speaks to us and through us.

What can we learn from the events of that Sunday? For one, that we will be misunderstood. That we will pray and toil for the salvation of others who will not appreciate what we do. But also, that we should not expect worldly recognition and praise for what we do, for it usually comes as the result of misunderstanding.

Rather let's long to be like our Lord Jesus, fully devoted to His mission, not swayed or worried by what people think or say, be it critique or compliments, knowing that if we keep following Jesus, we will end up where He is now, and by God's grace may even lead other there. And that is much more than we could hope for. More than enough.

Blessed Palm Sunday, Brothers and Sisters!

Amen.