

Jesus processes into Jerusalem and the people joyously shout, Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord—the *King* of Israel! What a wonderful scene, a crowd gathers in triumphant jubilation to welcome Jesus, whom they proclaim as their King. Soon another crowd will gather. This time it is not to shout Hosanna to Jesus, the King of Israel, but to shout before Pilate cries of utter disdain, “Away with him, away with him, away with him, crucify him, crucify him!”

Scripture does not tell us how many from the first crowd, who welcomed Jesus as King, were among those of the second crowd now calling for His crucifixion. But there must have been many because Pilate recognizes their hypocrisy. He presents to them a bloodied Jesus who had just been beaten, scourged and given a crown, a *kingly* crown of thorns. Pilate then ridicules the crowd, saying, “Here is your king!” The crowd objects, calling all the more for Jesus’ execution; but Pilate mocks them all the more, “Shall I crucify your *king*?”

Isn’t it amazing that those who welcomed our Lord into the Holy City as their King are among the *same* people who are calling for His death? What blatant hypocrisy. Pilate rubs their nose in it, as if to say, “One day, you were proclaiming Him as your king with jubilant shouts of Hosanna and now you want to crucify your king?!”

From what little we know of Pilate; he was not a nice man. He could be brutal, but even Pilate seems disgusted by these people. Pilate even wanted to release Jesus, but he feared the accusations of the crowd, that he was no friend to the emperor if he released one who claimed to be a king. And so, Pilate had Jesus crucified.

There is a striking contrast, then, between the jubilant welcoming of Jesus into Jerusalem and to what this welcoming would eventually lead—Jesus’ condemnation and His horrifying execution.

What does all of this mean? What is the significance of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem amid shouts of Hosanna and palm branches?

The shouts of Hosanna and the rustling of branches were part of the Temple worship during the Feast of Tabernacles. On each of the seven days of the feast, the priests would take branches in their arms, and while rustling them, they would go in solemn procession around the altar of burnt offering and they would monotonously shout, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!" The word Hosanna means, "Save us". On the last day of the feast, the seventh day, the procession was repeated seven times.

The Feast of Tabernacles commemorated God's saving help for His people in the Wilderness, but it also looked forward to the promised Messiah who would draw *all the nations* to Jerusalem to worship the one God. The Feast of Tabernacles was unique in this regard, in that unlike all the other Jewish feasts, God instructed

Moses to invite the Gentiles (i.e., all the nations) so that they too would learn to fear the Lord (Deut. 31:12). Because the feast of Tabernacles looked forward to the Messiah, the shouting of Hosanna became associated with expectant rejoicing and jubilation in the hope of his coming to save His people.

As the Lord entered the Holy City, the people took branches and ran out to meet Him, shouting in jubilation, "Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna", that is, "Save us! Save us! Save us!" In shouting Hosanna and rejoicing as they did, they were acknowledging Him as the Messiah, crying out, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!"

Jesus was entering Jerusalem, the Holy City. It was the *Holy City* because it contained the Temple, that place where God's presence dwelt among His people. As such, the Holy City represents the Temple. With shouts of Hosanna and palm branches, Jesus was processing in the Holy City, that is, in the Temple, like the priest processing around the altar of sacrifice. Jesus' altar of sacrifice,

however, was the Holy Cross where he would be both the priest, that is, the one who offers sacrifice, and the offering itself, a sacrifice to God in His blood for the sins of the people, including the gentiles, that is, for all the nations.

On this Feast of Palm Sunday, we see the same reality in the Divine Liturgy. Just before Christ becomes our priest and our sacrifice on the altar in this Holy Temple, we, with branches in hand, as did those who welcomed Him into Jerusalem, begin “Singing, shouting, crying aloud, and saying the triumphal hymn: “Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!” (Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom). Just as those who were in Jerusalem, we joyfully welcome the Lord, our Messiah, but not without our *own* hypocrisy.

We see it in ourselves...the capacity for love at one moment and indifference or even hatred at another. The Apostle Paul was very aware of this in himself. In his letter to the Romans he says,

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. For I do not do the good

I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind.

Today, we hold up our branches rejoicing at the coming of the Messiah. Our Divine Savior goes ahead of our jubilant cries of Hosanna, on to His crucifixion for our sins. Should we not blush with embarrassment? Should we not feel the awkwardness of what we are doing? Do we not realize that to which we are *really* welcoming Him today, to be our sacrificial offering?

So, let today be a day of true sorrow for our many sins. Let us sincerely repent, and with hearts full of tender love for our Lord, seek His forgiveness, which he longs to bestow on us. Let us repent not just in word, but in deeds by confessing our sins, by acts of penance and works of love and kindness toward others. If we do this, we will be able shout Hosanna *unashamed* on Pascha morning, at His Holy Resurrection.

Lord, Jesus, Son of God, Hosanna! Save us! Amen.