

### *Entry of our Lord into Jerusalem, or Palm Sunday*

On this day the Holy Church especially commemorates the imperial glorification of Jesus Christ before His death on the cross to indicate that the sufferings of the Savior were voluntary. The event of the feast is described in the Gospels (Mt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-41; John 12:12-19). The beginning of this feast goes back to deep antiquity. We meet the most ancient instruction on it in the teaching for this day of Methodius of Patara (3rd c.). Beginning from the VII century, many hymnographers (Andrew of Crete, Cosmas of Maium, John of Damascus, Theodore and Joseph of the Studite Monastery, the Emperor Leo the Philosopher, Theophanes and Nicephorus Xanthopoulos) have glorified the feast with hymns, which we sing even now. It is traditional to use palms on this feast (palm branches). It is even called "Palm" Sunday, "Flower bearing", "Flower offering" or "Flowery", and in popular usage "Palm Sunday". For us willows replace palms because the willow tree blossoms before other trees. The tradition to use palms on this feast is based on the circumstances of the event of the Entry of our Lord into Jerusalem (refer to page 274). Praying as though we will invisibly meet the Lord and greet Him as the Victor over Hades and death, we hold in our hands the "signs of victory": the willows and lighted candles 1).

#### *Troparion, tone 4*

**When we were buried with Thee in Baptism, O Christ God,  
We were made worthy of eternal life by Thy Resurrection.  
Now we praise Thee and sing:  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord.**

#### *Kontakion, tone 6*

**Sitting on Thy throne in heaven,  
Carried on a foal on earth,  
O Christ God.  
Accept the praise of angels  
And the songs of children, who sing:  
Blessed is He that comes to recall Adam.**

#### *The Magnification*

**We magnify You,  
O Christ the Giver of Life,  
And we cry to You:  
"Hosanna in the highest.**

## **Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord."**

Because this feast is between days of fasting, it has neither Forefeast nor Afterfeast; but it is one of the **Twelve Major Feasts** and the whole service is for the feast only. The blessing of willows is done at Matins after the reading of the gospel. During the reading of Psalm 50 the priest censes the palms crosswise, from all 4 sides, after the reading of the psalm, the deacon intones: "Let us pray to the Lord", and the choir sings: "Lord, have mercy" 3 times, and the priest reads the prayer for the blessing of palms; the sprinkling of the willows with holy water, according to the Ustav (Typikon) is not necessary (Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1895, 23). During the approach of the faithful to venerate the Gospel, the priest gives each one a palm with a candle 2). According to the Ustav (Typikon), it is necessary to kiss the Gospel, but not the icon, and the anointing with oil is not done (Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1895, 23).

If during an enormous gathering of people the distribution of the blessed palms is unthinkable, it is possible to follow the example of some priests: after the reading of the appointed prayers for the temple to pass and to sprinkle them with holy water in different directions (Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1888, 15). Candles, which are held during Matins, are usually extinguished after the Canon.

In the Trinity - St. Sergius Laura after the liturgy there is a cross procession around the entire Laura along the wall (having an extent in length more than 550 sagene (3,850 feet), and in width in some places up to 7 and more arshine (196 inches)). Today this procession is done in memory of the Entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem and is why the reading and the singing during the time of following Him are taken from the church services of this feast. The clergy and the brethren participating in this solemn procession and the usual accompanying crowd of people hold blessed willows in their hands.

**Matins Gospel:** Mt. 21:1-11, 15-17; sel. 83. The **Liturgy** of St. John Chrysostom. **Epistle:** Philippians 4:4-9; sel. 274. **Gospel:** John 12:1-18; sel. 41. At Vespers there is an entrance, but after it there is no Great Prokimenon, but the Prokimenon of the day: "Behold now bless the Lord". "At the agape meal we eat fish and drink wine, thanking God".

On Palm Sunday a collection is taken for the benefit of the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society 3). This collection is made as follows:

1) The proclamation for this collection, and the present rule for its collection, after its reception is immediately printed in the local diocesan news.

2) The Spiritual Consistories beforehand deliver to all of the churches of the diocese without exception the inscribed document for the collection plate received from the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society, which consists of the

proclamation, the announcement and the interview, and invite the clergy to personally enforce the present rules and to expend special effort for the making of the collection.

3) After the reception in the church of the proclamations and interviews of the church servers outside the liturgical conversations and the readings in the churches and schools where those are available, and also the sermon in divine services acquaint the parishioners with the purpose of the present collection. And at the entrance to the church the proclamation, announcement and interview delivered for this purpose by the Society are distributed free-of-charge to competent parishioners.

4) One Sunday prior to the day of the collection the proclamation of the Society about the collection is attached to the external entrance doors of the church.

5) On the days of the collection an oral sermon acquaints the congregation on the value and the purpose of the collection.

6) The collection plate is passed around a plate during all worship services of the feast of the Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem (at the liturgy after the reading of the Gospel, and at the All-night Vigil in Matins after the reading of the Six Psalms).

7) This collection is taken in the churches where there are several priests by one of the priests and where there is one priest by the Church Warden or one of prominent parishioners.

8) At the end of the divine services the report is immediately prepared on the collected money in the presence of the priest, the Church Warden and several prominent parishioners.

9) The collected money together with the report is presented through the dean to the diocesan bishop who delivers them to the Council of the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society (St. Petersburg, Moika, 91).

#### Notes:

1) In Little Russia there is a custom in the villages, on the eve of the feast before Vespers to carry willows, after their sanctification by prayers, around the church. But in the cities they carry the willows from one church, mainly standing at the city line, to another church either the cathedral or the monastery church. Devout Christians usually keep the blessed willows for the whole year, decorating an icon with them in their homes. In some districts there is a pious custom to enclose blessed willows in the hands of the dead, as a sign that, according to their faith in Christ, they will conquer death and will resurrect coming out from the graves with the blessed palms to the sound of the trumpets of the archangels in meeting the Savior (Rev.: 7:6). Our simple people attaches special

powers to the blessed willows: the peasant tries to protect himself and his relatives from illnesses with them; he tries to protect his domestic cattle from any kind of illness, from attack by predatory beasts, from malicious people and evil spirits with them; finally, he attaches to them a cleansing power. The various rites concerning the "branches" that are kept till now in Great Russia, Little Russia and Byelorussia witness to this. In some places of Byelorussia (in the Kostroma province) peasant women bake baranka (a round roll) for Palm Sunday and, coming from church, feed these baranki to their domestic cattle to protect the latter from illnesses. On St. George's day (Nov. 26) peasants take the willows kept during the year, dip them in holy water and then sprinkle the domestic cattle gathered in the yard with it. With willows in their hands they also lead the cattle to pasture. In Byelorussia on St. George's day they sprinkle their cattle with the willows dipped in Baptismal water. In the evening on this day the willows, that sprinkled the cattle in the morning, either is broken into as many pieces as the heads of the cattle the owner has (pieces of these are then burnt), or is stuck in the gates or in the doors of the cattle barn so that the cattle went directly home and also to protect the cattle from harm that comes from the bad influence of evil spirits and malicious people. In some provinces of Russia willows that are blessed on Willow Sunday are used as remedy during the illness of domestic cattle. They are put in the swill prepared for ill cows, calves and so forth. In Byelorussia there is one more ceremony at which the blessed willow is used. On Great Saturday during Passion Week, Byelorussian peasant women burn up the blessed willows kept from Palm Sunday in a furnace, meaning to clean the home fireplace by a fire lit from the blessed willows. Thus, blessed on the day of commemorating the Entry of our Lord into Jerusalem the willow plays a rather important role in the lives of our people. Though in all these customs and rites it is also possible to see the expression of the faith of the Russian Orthodox peasant in the power and effectiveness of the church blessings, but, unfortunately, this faith is darkened by various sorts of superstitions, and the "willow" ceremonies and customs are thereby in most cases deprived of their true religious and church character. Concerning the widespread custom of "whipping" each other with the blessed willows it recently, especially in Little Russian cities, has become an activity of the youth and itself represents street entertainment, profaning "the sign of victory", and sometimes directly ending in shocking slaughter.

2) Who does not know those disorders that occur in many of our churches during the distribution of willows on Palm Sunday? The priest will only read the prayer and sprinkle a willow with holy water and in the church the noise and the crush begins. Everyone hastens to grab a consecrated branch for himself, the splinter of a broken willow is distributed, and sometimes even the shouts of suppressed children...Whether those praying up to this time in order to hear the

beautiful Canon of Cosmas of Maium with its very poetic Irmoi: "The springs of the abysses". And so it happens from year to year. And these troubled priests also are involuntarily reconciled to this, probably believing that nothing can be done to prevent this. But it seems possible to do this, and that is why one should try. At least, do you see such disorder occurring everywhere? Are there temples of God in which similar things does not happen? And if so then it follows only to observe the way these churches warn about disorder and to follow their example. Let us give an example, last year as the willows were distributed in a large temple where up to two thousand people were gathered at the all-night vigil, and for the most part included visitors from all over the Russian land. On the eve the rector discussed with the church warden who invited 10-12 young people from among the parishioners that they, during the reading of the holy gospel, stand in front of those praying and to form, joining hands, a living chain from one kliros to the other kliros. This gives the clergy more freedom to move about at the analogion. Here, before the icon of the feast the gospels are read; Psalm 50 is read from the kliros. The censuring of the willows begins. Only after the reader has chanted the closing words, "bullocks on Thy altar", the priest goes to the ambo and turns to face the people, makes the sign of the cross and begins to speak: "Beloved in the Lord brethren and co-worshippers! Today you heard in the holy gospel, the Hebrew children with much joy met our Lord Jesus Christ when He entered into Jerusalem to His voluntary passion for our salvation. They met Him with palm branches, as the Conqueror of death. They called out to Him: "Hosanna" as the awaited King. To make even us participants in this joy, to make us more vividly remember this event, the Holy Church will now bless with prayers and the sprinkling of the water of Theophany and will distribute these consecrated branches to us. These willows speak much to our hearts. In her view she remembers the cross of Christ. By the flowers she remembers His most pure blood, poured out from the cross, and these poor little white flowers, doesn't it remind them of the pure, holy souls of righteous men, washed and whitened by the blood of Christ the Savior and by the cross crossing the sky? So these willows are significant. Such is the profound didactic custom of the Holy Church to distribute them today. Let's not, brethren, offend this rite with our impatience! I am speaking about that disorder that usually happens in churches at the distribution of the willows. Beloved brethren! Apostle Paul rules that in the temple of God all things should be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:39). But the rubrics and the church Typikon (Ustav) demands that no one should dare to voluntarily take the blessed willows by himself. No, it should be taken from the hand of the church server, from the Holy Gospel and from the image of Christ, and only then it will be a blessing received in his entire house. So, I ask you, brethren: to approach orderly and reverently to the holy icon of the feast and the holy gospel, so that the church server will put the blessed branch into your hands, before the

holy image of Christ, as though it came from Christ, and depart in peace, without noise, without confusion. Be at rest: everyone will get these branches, and the Lord, for your humility and obedience to the Typikon (Ustav) of His Holy Church, our mother, will bless you with a special blessing. Let us pray to the Lord". And then the priest began the prayer for the blessing of palms. One should see what silence reigned in the temple after he spoke this simple lecture. At its end we noticed that some pilgrims came with their own willows, quietly handing them over to the circle of the young people to add them to the willows to be consecrated, which were bunches gathered in the holes of a large wooden cross, deliberately arranged for this purpose. After the blessing of the willows, the priest himself came before the icon of the feast, took a willow for himself, behind him the deacon approached and received a branch from the hand of the priest, and stood near him with a vessel of oil, and one of the churchmen began to give the priest a willow who, anointing the forehead of the pilgrims with his right hand, gave him a branch with his left hand. Orderly, one by one, a long chain of pilgrims approached the icon, received a willow from the hand of the priest and departed without noise and jostling. That's all that appeared necessary for the elimination of disorder. There, where there are two or three priests makes it even easier. One will anoint with oil, and the other will distribute the willows. The main thing is to instill in the pilgrims that they have no right under the church Typikon (Ustav) to take the blessed branches themselves. This is the duty of the priest (Tserkovniya Vedomosti (Church News) 1891, 11).

3) The annual collection on Palm Sunday in all the Orthodox Churches of Russia for the benefit of the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society is an essential subscription of the common parish for the budget of the Palestinian Society. The Palestinian Society presents, mainly, grants and discount travel for Russian pilgrims to Palestine to the tomb of the Lord and the maintenance of Orthodoxy in Palestine. The society through its representatives, residing in various cities of Russia, delivers to all Russians, wishing to go to venerate the tomb of the Lord, so called pilgrim manuals, giving them the right of discount travel to and from Jerusalem. At the same time it renders its help to Russian pilgrims even after their arrival in Palestine. Here the Society organizes even local farmsteads, offering to our worshippers (partly free-of-charge) both warm housing and food. A second task of the Palestinian Society is achieved first of all by the reconstruction of Orthodox temples that have become dilapidated in Palestine, and then the building of elementary schools for the local population in which the children of Orthodox parents could be nurtured in the spirit of the faith of their fathers. Through its resources the Palestinian Society makes available in Palestine a hospital (in Jerusalem) and a few ambulatories (clinics), admittance to which is accessible to all the inhabitants of Palestine regardless of national origin and

religion. The Society selects as honorary members persons who have been noted for their special merits for the benefit of Orthodox Palestine. Full members of the Society may be persons who offer a one time donation of 500 rubles to the Society or who pay 25 rubles annually, but those who offer a one time donation of 200 rubles or who pay 10 rubles annually for the disposal of the Society are considered as employees.

*S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp 528-31.  
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