**PALM SUNDAY**

Brothers and Sisters, in the Old Testament we read this prophecy:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you; righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Entrance of the Theotokos to the Temple

On this day, this prophecy was, and is, fulfilled.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  Amen.

Wonder of wonders, today the Creator of the Cosmos itself, our Lord Jesus Christ, entered the Holy City of Jerusalem as its King.  He did not come with an army but was escorted by children; nor was He riding on a white horse or in a gilded chariot.  Instead, He came on a young mule, a very low creature.  So far as we know, the Lord *Adonai*, Jesus Christ, never rode a donkey or a mule before this occasion; He always walked with His disciples. He ate and slept and sweated in their midst. Often He drew apart from them for prayer, but He never expected any special privilege.

Yet coming to the Holy City in this manner recalled, for the learned Jews, that when King Solomon became ascended the throne after his father, King David, he rode on his father's favorite mule during the procession into the royal city of Jerusalem.

So, now, on this mule, Jesus came as the true King of Jerusalem, in the line of King David. Let me point out that the contrast with how things work in our world today is astonishing, for we have numerous presidents, dictators, and tyrants who are striving to be the Kings of *Babylon*, who rule with war and terror, and are not Kings of *Peace*.  They come to us in five ton armored cars and huge air vehicles, and with great military escorts…weaponry of all kinds…incredible and unimaginable security….

A man by the name of Nick Brown put it this way: “Throughout the entire history of the known world, men have conquered other men. Rulers have conquered cities. Emperors have conquered entire nations. At times, Kings have striven to conquer the entire world. But there remains one uncharted territory that has eluded men of power all throughout history. *This unconquered territory is the human heart, and its sole conqueror is Christ the king....*

But “today we celebrate Christ as the king who enters our own personal Jerusalem--our hearts. [But]Today’s feast day is [just] a momentary feast of joy and celebration, because [now] we begin the final leg of our journey towards Pascha. Our mood changes from one of joy this morning to one of solemnity, almost of sorrow…as we lead up to the great sacrifice that Christ performed for us on the cross.”

The joyful shouts of “Hosanna” will now very soon be replaced by shouts of “Crucify Him!  Crucify Him!”—and from the very same people who greet the Lord as King on this day!  Brothers and sisters: what about *us*?  Are we so shallow that we can wave our palms, and sing occasional hymns of praise, but then refuse to obey our King and, by our sins, shout “Crucify Him!” all over again?

The observance of Palm Sunday goes all the way back to the very earliest days of Christianity, that’s how ancient it is.  The first Christians considered it important because this was the first public recognition of Christ as Messiah-King. Orthodox Christians celebrate this event not just as a historical remembrance, but as if it is truly and actually happening *today, an* eternal event—for we do indeed celebrate Christ as the king who enters our hearts, our own personal Jerusalem. But *is* Christ able to enter? Is there room in our hearts for Christ to rule as king? Often the doors of our hearts are locked. Often Christ is unable to enter because there is already another king of the heart – *ourselves*!

How easily forget that we have made ourselves prisoners of *our own selves,* and of this world, of our careers, of money, of the politicians who rule over us, and worst of all, we are even slaves to our own passions.  On the throne of our hearts is our own ego, not the Man of Sorrows, the King of Peace and the Savior of our souls.

In the Gospel account for today we see also how the delighted crowd casts cloaks on the ground before the Lord and He, on His mule, rides over them.  This is highly significant, for it symbolizes Christ taking possession of His own people.  We too, on this day, are invited to cast our “cloaks” on the ground before the Savior as He enters the Jerusalem of our hearts.  But here is how one of the great Holy Fathers of the Church, St. Andrew of Crete, expressed this:

He said, “So let us spread before His feet, not garments or soulless olive branches [and palms], which delight the eye for a few hours and then wither, but *ourselves*, clothed in His grace, or rather, *clothed completely in Him”.*

Gerondissa and I wish all of you a most sober, somber, blessed, and grace-filled Holy Week, as all of us now go, with Christ and the apostles, “up to Jerusalem.”

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  Amen, and Amen.