



Metropolitan Hilarion: Christ entered into Jerusalem not to seize temporal power but to sacrifice Himself for the salvation of all

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On April 17, 2011, the Entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the church of Our Lady the Joy to All the Afflicted-on-Bolshaya-Ordynka, in Moscow.

The clergy and laity extended congratulation to His Eminence as two years ago he celebrated for the first time in that church as its rector. Parishioners presented their archpastor with liturgical vestments.

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After the liturgy, Metropolitan Hilarion addressed the congregation with the following archpastoral homily:

“Today we celebrate the Entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem. This event precedes the developments on the Passion Week when our Lord Jesus Christ entered the holy city of Jerusalem riding a donkey and accompanied by joyful shouts of children (see, Mt. 21:8-11). The people welcomed Christ as a king because they pinned their hopes in him on a political settlement of the situation from which the Jews had suffered for many years under the Roman authority. They hoped a mighty king would come and deliver them from the foreign rule and restore the once glorious kingdom of Israel.

People who were meeting Jesus at the entrance to Jerusalem had heard him preaching and knew about the miracles he performed, especially about Lazarus's rising from the dead (this news spread rapidly through Jerusalem and its environs). That was why they greeted the Saviour not only as king but also as prophet, in the hope that their country, lying as it was in a religious decay, would be able to revive, just as it happened under the great kings David, Solomon and others whose memory was alive among the people of Israel.

But the Lord Jesus Christ entered into Jerusalem not to seize political or civil power, not to overthrow the Roman rule but to sacrifice Himself for the salvation of all people. And this sacrifice applied not only to the small Jewish country and not only to the great Roman Empire as it was at that time but embraced the whole world and the whole humanity, not only those who lived at that time but also those who had lived before and those who would live after, including us.

It was a sacrifice that the Lord Himself offered to save each, for it is not in one's human power to overcome the distance that separates one from God, to get rid of sin and to reach the Heavenly Kingdom. The way man had to cover to meet God was covered by God Himself Who came out to meet man. He came not in glory and power but in meekness and humbleness. *See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious* (Zech. 9:9) – this was the prophecy about the Messiah and this prophecy was fulfilled when the Lord Jesus Christ entered into Jerusalem.

He revealed to humanity the humble image of God – God Who loves and expects the salvation of every human being and not only expects it passively but is ready to link His own life with their destiny. The Pantocrator so loves His creatures that He is ready to share human life with them and to drink from the cup of suffering and together with Himself to raise the whole human race from the dead.

When the Lord Jesus Christ entered into Jerusalem He was welcomed not only by adults but also children (see Mt. 21:15-16). What did attract children to this meek man who came to the Holy City riding a donkey? They were attracted to Him by God's grace. On this day, which is a feast day for both adults and children, we should again and again think about our responsibility before children for their Christian upbringing. How often do adults think that the little ones are bored in church and that they come to church under the lash! It happens so that parents leave their children in the charge of nannies and housemaids so that they could come to the service but they forget that children need grace no less than adults and we draw this grace from the one source of salvation which is the Church of Christ.

From one's very infancy one should be brought up in the fear of God and in the love of the church. There are Christian trends and sects which maintain that infants should not be baptized because they do not understand what happens to them. Some believe it is violence against the personality, against personal freedom. They say, let children grow up a little and then they themselves will decide whether to come or not to church and to which religion to belong or to believe or not at all. We, Orthodox Christians, will never agree with such views because we believe that a person should participate in God's grace from infancy, for children and adults equally need it. No adult has the right to deprive a child of access to this source of living water flowing into eternal life (see. Jn. 4:14). This source is the partaking of Christ's Body and Blood. And if children sometimes play up in church, it is only because such is the child's nature. Actually, the soul of a child is no less and may be even more sensitive than the soul of an adult to the flows of God's grace pouring on us.

We should love our children and express this love also by taking them to church, teaching them to see in the church of God their spiritual home. Even if they are not rationally aware of what happens in church, even if they are not able yet to understand the words of the liturgy, children are nourished by God's grace which naturally draws them to Christ the Saviour, as it was two thousand years ago when the crowds of children came out to welcome the meek and saving King.

May God give us all to meet our Saviour with love, reverence and meekness as He is coming to voluntary passions. May God give us to turn to God with open hearts as children of Israel did, in prayer that He may change our life for the better and enlighten our hearts and become our guide on the way to the Heavenly Kingdom. May God give us in the days of the Passion Week to experience the last days and minutes of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth and to celebrate the feast of the radiant Resurrection of Christ. Amen”.

Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/55734/>