

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church

971 St. Clair Rd, Johnstown, PA 15905

Rev. Presbyter Dragan Vukovic

(814) 244-4063

The Feast of Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem (04.17.2022)

John 12:1-18

Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always. Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead. But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus. On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord. And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt. These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him. The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him

from the dead, bare record. For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle. (KJV)

God's Holy Church is celebrating the Feast of Jesus Christ's Entry into Jerusalem today. Jesus in humility entered Jerusalem riding on the back of an ass's colt. A great crowd was present desiring to see Jesus and to greet Him.

Jesus having raised Lazarus from the dead is an integral part of today's Gospel. Jesus' death is mentioned as is the betrayal of Jesus. The joy of the entry into Jerusalem would change in the following days.

The Church has arrived at Great and Holy Week. Each day has great meaning for believers and for the world. Today is a day to look deep into the heart, mind and soul and determine the relationship with Jesus Christ.

Are we genuinely united with Christ as among the eminently faithful? Are we lukewarm in faith and casual believers? Will we be determined to be a modern Judas ultimately betraying Jesus Christ?

The Feast of the Entry into Jerusalem is for the benefit and enrichment of believers. Each person determines the degree he or she will embrace Jesus Christ and identify with Jesus as He goes forth before the crowd.

Each person determines the degree the raising of Lazarus from the dead has an impact on his or her personal life and faith. The raising of Lazarus is a foreshadowing of the Resurrection.

The raising of Lazarus is proof of Jesus' power over death. The way a person views the raising of Lazarus from the dead will influence the way a person lives and understands life and death.

The dynamics involved in the Feast of the Entry into Jerusalem have deep and lasting meaning for life. Betrayal of Jesus by one of His immediate followers, Judas, is a strong lesson to consider.

Being physically close to Jesus Christ does not guarantee ultimate faithfulness to Christ. Faithfulness requires the heart, mind and soul to belong to Christ, not simply outward appearances of closeness to Christ.

Resurrection of the dead is a theme in the present Gospel. Pascha, the joyful celebration of Jesus' Resurrection is only a week away. The world changed forever when Jesus was put to death on the Cross and rose from the Tomb.

Jesus' Resurrection is the guiding belief for firm believers through the centuries. Pascha is called the Feast of Feasts for a reason. The events leading to Jesus' arrest, trial, death on the cross and burial are ahead in the coming days.

The Church wants believers to learn anew and to be renewed in Christ each year. Renewal in Christ is a life-long expectation. Living in Christ is a daily expectation and anticipation.

The Church nourishes believers and provides hope for believers at all levels of faith and degrees of sinfulness. Jesus Christ welcomes sinners seeking to repent. Jesus Christ welcomes and provides hope for believers in despair.

The joy of Jesus entering Jerusalem is associated with Jesus' recognized power over death. Every person faces an earthly death. Jesus is proof there is more to life than an earthly ending in death.

The Church teaches and provides believers with the experience of the hope of eternal life and the Heavenly Kingdom. Believers have a responsibility to be involved in the Church and to actively be attentive and to learn about Christ.

Being lukewarm as a Christian does not provide the full benefits that are available to baptized believers. Joy in Christ is possible each day for believers serious about Christ.

Hope is always present for believers centering life in Christ. Miracles are always possible for believers of firm faith and love for Christ. Obstacles in life are manageable and can be overcome with faith in Christ.

God's Holy Church brings the Feast of the Entry into Jerusalem before the world today. The world changes because of this festal celebration. Today is the day for joy in the heart, mind and soul of believers.

The Feast of the Lord Jesus Christ's Entry into Jerusalem. Palm Sunday. April 4/17, 2022. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic

HIS VOICE SHOOK THE INFERNAL ABYSS A Homily for the Raising of Lazarus

[Metropolitan Philaret \(Voznesensky\)](#)

Raising Lazarus, Oil on Copper Plate, 1875, Carl Heinrich Bloch (Hope Gallery, Salt Lake City). Photo: wikipedia.org Before I say my word, brothers and sisters, I would like to say: Remember that those who commune of the Holy Mysteries should first try to come by the very beginning of the service, and second, confess, if possible, ahead of time, not at the last moment. I don't say this to reprimand anyone—no! Because I know that it's difficult for many; many live far

away, and means of communication aren't always adequate—this goes without saying. But as far as possible, always try to come to church and confess in advance and on time. It's not good when people confess when the chalice has already been brought out. They should be standing then listening to the last prayer at the chalice before Communion, not before the analogion confessing their sins—this should be done earlier. I'm saying this so you keep it in mind.

As we know from the Gospel, our Lord Jesus Christ told those around Him: *Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* (Mt. 11:28). And He further indicated that if a man takes up His yoke, His commandments, and His law, then *ye shall find rest unto your souls* (Mt. 11:29). This is why the Son of God was incarnate; this is why He came to Earth—to bring peace to worn-out mankind.

And this, in particular, is what people on Earth usually fear more than anything—[death](#). Every philosophy retreats before death. All wisdom fades away when a coffin is before a man, and in it the decaying body of a dead man. No philosophy can help here! As said the hero of one of Turgenev's novels: "Try to deny death. It will deny you, and that will be the end of it!"¹ So that's why the Lord came—I repeat, to calm human souls, knowing that what terrifies man most is death. And in this terrible matter, He gives us comfort and joy such that none but He, of course, can ever give. He said many times that He is the Resurrection and the Life, that for those who believe in Him, though they should die, they will live again. And we read in the Gospel how he prophetically said, foretelling the future, that there would be a moment when *all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, And shall come forth* (Jn. 5:28-29). Such a bright promise He has given us.

But His care for us didn't stop there. He well knew that no matter how comforting such a promise is to man, the ever-present reality of death is terrifying. That's why, before the very end of His earthy life, He works an amazing, great miracle—He goes to the grave of the deceased Lazarus. There were instances when He raised the dead before this: the son of the widow of Nain, the maiden Tabitha,² the daughter of Jairus—but these were fresh victims who had just been taken by death, and He returned them to life. But here before us is the terrifying picture that not only had death already seized its victim, but had done its terrible deed, destroying the physical composition of the man, now rotting and decomposing.

Before this terrible picture of death appeared the Ruler of Life, saying: *Take ye away the stone*. He frightened those around Him. Martha made haste to say: *Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days* (Jn. 11:39). Others were probably even more scared, thinking: "What's this about? The smell of corruption will be

unbearable. What’s He want?” But when they heard His word and rolled away the stone, as a man He offered up His prayer of thanksgiving to the Heavenly Father, and as God, turns to the rotting corpse, and we hear that voice that will thunder at some point in the future, when His Divine word that all the dead will come forth from their graves at the voice of the Son of God will be fulfilled. And in order to show people and assuage them completely, He shows what it will look like. And His awesome voice is heard: *Lazarus, come forth!* (Jn. 11:43). As it says in the prayers of the Church, this voice shook the whole infernal abyss, all the depths of Hades. Hell trembled, gave forth its victims, and he who just frightened everyone from the tomb comes out of it alive and well.

What an astounding and at the same time joyous miracle! That’s why this feast, Lazarus Saturday as we call it, is especially bright and joyous—one of the brightest days of the year! We see here in practice how our resurrection will occur, when the voice of the Son of God sounds forth—and by this voice the dead will leave their tombs, coming out alive. Only He could give people such hope and assure us this way! After that, the Church truly could calmly proclaim that when a man dies, it’s not the abyss of nothingness for him, it’s not annihilation, but if he’s a Christian then it’s only “rest eternal in blessed repose” for him. This is what the Lord has given us in this wonderful, striking miracle of His!

But don’t forget, beloved, that this feast is, as it were, a pre-celebration of [tomorrow’s great feast](#). They have the same troparion: “By raising Lazarus from the dead before Thy Passion, Thou didst confirm the universal Resurrection, O Christ God!...” But this great feast tomorrow leads us to new liturgical sacred memories of the last days of the life of our Savior, of His last conversations and instructions, and, finally, of that great and holy deed that He accomplished in the Garden of Gethsemane, taking our sins upon Himself; on the [Golgotha Cross](#), nailing these sins to the Cross and cleansing them with His Most Pure Blood; and, finally, coming out of His Sepulcher in glory, as the resurrected conqueror of hell and death! Don’t forget about this! The most wonderful, the most beautiful time in our Church liturgical year is beginning. Everyone should take care to go to church as much as possible on these sacred days, to spiritually nourish our souls and strengthen ourselves spiritually for the time to come.

Amen.

*[Metropolitan Philaret \(Voznesensky\)](#)
Translation by Jesse Dominick*

The Prologue from Ochrid
St Nikolai of Zhicha
(04.07.2022)

SAINT NICETAS THE CONFESSOR

Nicetas was born in Bithynia, in the city of Caesarea. His father, Philaret, was tonsured a monk after the death of his spouse, while Nicetas remained with his paternal grandmother. After reaching maturity and completing all of his studies, Nicetas entered the Monastery of Medikion, where the Abbot Nicephorus tonsured him a monk. After seven years of hardship and ascetic labors, Patriarch Tarasius ordained him a hieromonk (priest-monk). Following the deaths of Abbot Nicephorus and Athanasius (Nicetas's faithful companion), the monastic brotherhood elected Nicetas abbot, against his will. For many years St. Nicetas was an example to his brethren of asceticism and a holy life. When Leo V, the Armenian, was crowned emperor (after the pious Irene and the right-believing Emperors Nicephorus and Michael), the iconoclastic struggle was again inflamed. The emperor deposed Patriarch Nicephorus and sent him into exile and, in his place, elevated the heretic Theodotus Cassiteras, a man of impure life. Nicetas was also imprisoned and tortured, but he remained steadfast in his Orthodoxy. He was led from prison to prison, suffering from hunger, thirst, chills, oppressive heat and mockery. But he did not permit himself to waver. He was particularly bothered by the laughter and scorn of a certain Nicholas. One night, Nicholas's deceased father appeared to Nicholas in a dream and rebuked him, saying: "Leave that servant of God alone!" From that moment, Nicholas repented and not only did not annoy the saint anymore, but turned others away from annoying him also. When Leo the Armenian met with a wicked death, the rule of the empire was taken up by the Orthodox Emperor Michael Balbus (the "Stammerer") who liberated all the Orthodox sufferers. Nicetas then withdrew to an isolated place near Constantinople, where in prayer and thanksgiving to God for all things he spent the remaining days of his earthly life. During his lifetime he worked many miracles through prayer. When he died, his body was translated to his monastery. During the funeral procession, many of the sick reached out and touched his body, and were healed. His relics were placed next to the grave of Nicephorus, his spiritual father, and

Athanasius, his companion. This great hierarch reposed in the year 824 A.D.

2. SAINT PAUL THE SORROWFUL

Paul was a Russian by birth. In his youth he was enslaved by the Turks. Not wanting to deny the Christian Faith or to embrace Islam, he was tortured and slain by the sword in Constantinople in the year 1683 A.D.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR ULPHIANUS

Ulphianus was a young man from the city of Tyre. He suffered for Christ at the hands of Urban, the governor of the city of Tyre, who was also the torturer of Amphianus (April 2). Finally, he was tied in a sack with a dog and a snake, and was thrown into the sea. He suffered and was glorified in the year 306 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE

SAINT NICETAS THE CONFESSOR

"I bear on my body the wounds of Christ,^{*)}
"And only in the Cross of the Lord do I boast."^{**)}

Thus said Paul the chosen Apostle.

After him there followed a company of those who have repented,

A company of penitent ones, who received wounds

And spent their days in many sufferings

For the sake of the Living Christ, the Savior and Lord,

As did St. Paul, the Apostle of the people.

And the wonderful Nicetas bore a heavy cross;

Suffering and scorn he endured for Christ.

A spirit of steel In a fragile body--

In holy Nicetas the courageous martyr.

He conquered the emperor and outlived empires;

Therefore, the earth and the heavens are amazed at him.

Now crowned with glory among the angels,
He helps all who are persecuted for the Cross.

Before God his prayer ascends,
And to earth his help descends.

*) Galatians 6:17

***) Galatians 6:14

REFLECTION

"I await a thousand deaths for myself," wrote St. Athanasius the Great to his flock in Egypt at the time of the terrible Arian heresy. Every spiritual man, who has looked in spirit and seen the net which contains every human soul in this world, can say this about himself. The more spiritual a man is, the denser the net looks. Such is the will of God: that the most spiritual are saved by the most narrow path. The Psalmist David also says: *Many are the afflictions of the righteous* (Psalm 34:19). However, in the end, victory and glory belong to the righteous. They need only to arm themselves with faith and forbearance. Whoever believes also understands their sufferings. He who clothes himself with patience will see victory and glory. To him who loves the Lord, even the narrowest path is sufficiently wide, the greatest pain an easy yoke, and the most violent death a joyful wedding feast.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the Lord Jesus in hades:

1. How He descended into hades with great power, at which hades trembled;
2. How the evil spirits, who were then lords of hades, fled before His Face;
3. How the souls of the righteous ancestors and prophets overwhelmingly rejoiced at His coming.

HOMILY

on the great desire of God

"Who will have all men to be saved" (1Timothy 2:4).

God desires that all men be saved; that is why He descended into hades to save those who had lived on earth before His coming. For, had He not descended into hades, an enormous number of righteous souls would have perished forever. Moreover, had He not descended into hades, the main habitat of malice against God and the human race, hades would have remained undestroyed. There were two reasons that motivated Christ, the Giver of Life, to descend into hades in the Spirit: first, to destroy the nest of the powers of hades and, second, to bring from hades to heaven the souls of the ancestors, prophets and righteous men and women who had fulfilled the Old Law of God (dispensation) and had thus pleased God. Before Satan had done exulting at the sight of Christ humiliated and lifeless on the Cross, Christ appeared and lifeless on the Cross, Christ appeared alive and almighty in the midst of hades, the primary abode of Satan. What unexpected and dreadful news for Satan! For three years Satan had woven snares against Christ on earth, and in three days, behold, Christ destroyed Satan's kingdom and carried away the most precious booty, in the form of a throng of righteous souls.

O Lord, Thou desirest that all men be saved. We pray to Thee: save even us. For there is no salvation or Savior outside of Thee. In Thee do we hope, Thee alone do we worship--Thee, the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and always. Amen.

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.