



**Orthodox Mission of the
Entrance of the Theotokos
into the Temple**

**306 W. Main Street
Emmitsburg, MD 21727**

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***By Raising Lazarus from the Dead Before Thy Passion ...
April 25, 2021***

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

By raising Lazarus from the dead before Thy Passion, Thou didst confirm the universal resurrection, O Christ our God! Like the children with the palms of victory, we cry out to Thee, O vanquisher of death: Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord! (Troparion of Lazarus Saturday)

There is a special quality of Lazarus Saturday, unlike any day in our Church Year of Grace other than Pascha itself. What a remarkable story! It is the greatest of the seven “signs” in the gospel of John that our Lord accomplished prior to His Passion, Death and Resurrection. The fourth Gospel calls the miracles of our Lord not “miracles,” but “signs:” Signs that point beyond themselves to a meaning that is greater than the event itself. The Raising of Lazarus from the dead points beyond the action of the moment into the future of all mankind. It is a true sign of the universal resurrection of mankind from the dead, the foretaste of what each of us will experience ourselves. We will all die like Lazarus and the Eternal Son of God, the Savior of the World, will enter our tombs and call each of us back to life as He did when he entered the tomb of His friend Lazarus and commanded: “Lazarus, come out!” St. John reports that the dead man

did just that; he came out, alive again after four days in the tomb! Those present removed his grave wrappings, and Lazarus rejoined his family alive once more.

St. John tells us that many heard of this and came to greet Jesus the next day when He entered Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. He rode into the holy city on a donkey, a sign of His humility and a declaration that He came in fulfillment of the ancient prophecies. He came humble, riding upon an ass, the foal of an ass; and any who saw it would have known what He was saying by entering in this way. He, Jesus of Nazareth, son of the Virgin, was indeed the Messiah, the Christ. The innocent and untainted understood and laid before Him symbols of acclamation and triumph, palms, and some even put their own garments down in honor of Him. What did they expect Him to be? Clearly, some understood, but others did not. Many resisted what He is, what He represented, and greeted Him not with acceptance, but with distrust, suspicion and, as we will hear in the week that follows, hatred.

It is this reaction of the leaders of the temple that most troubles me. Some undoubtedly witnessed much of what He had done: reaching out to those who were ostracized, He brought them into communion with God once again; seeing those who were ill, He healed them; He wept with Mary and Martha at the death their brother and His friend Lazarus and raised him from the dead. They would have seen with their own eyes and heard with their own ears the wondrous deeds of the One Who entered Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday. And yet, many of those same people called for His crucifixion after one of His own disciples betrayed Him, and another denied Him. Didn't they know or understand what they were doing? Why did they resist Him so strongly that they wanted Him put to death?

There is a part of me that will never understand. And yet, there is a part of me that knows all too well why they reacted against Him. Resentment, fear of change, fear of loss of power, fear of loss of one's own way, resistance to submission to the One True God, even the One Who alone can heal, save and raise from the dead. It is all the same now even 2,000 years later. We know, hear and experience His wondrous saving grace, and yet we resist Him, ignore Him or actively oppose Him. Years ago, we sang a hymn on our knees in church on Good Friday; I will never forget its exceptional power:

*Ah, Holy Jesus, how hast Thou offended?
That man to judge thee, hath in hate pretended?
By foes derided, by thine own rejected,
O most afflicted.*

*Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee?
Alas, my treason, Jesus hath undone thee.
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee:
I crucified thee!*

Lazarus Saturday, that most joyous of all days prior to Pascha, reminds us of the magnitude of His power even over death, a sign of His loving kindness to us beyond all limits, a promise that

He will someday enter our own tombs and call us to Life Eternal with Him in His Kingdom, a Kingdom which as we confess in the creed "will have no end." Let each of us come before Him not with resentment or resistance, but with love and thanksgiving. And let each of us accompany Him on the road to Jerusalem and the cross that awaits; and, let each of us cry from the depths of our soul, "Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

Fr. Elias

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