

Palm Sunday

Reading: Matthew 25: 31-46

It's a day of festivity in the Church. The altar curtain is opened after the long, somber days of Lent. The candles are brightly lit, and the Church is decorated with palms and flowers. We celebrate the triumphant entry of Christ, the preacher and teacher, into Jerusalem. Triumphant, with cheering waving crowds, but also humble, riding not in a chariot or even on a festooned horse, but on a lowly donkey.

On Palm Sunday, all Christian churches celebrate the triumphant entry of Christ into Jerusalem near the end of his ministry. But in the Armenian Church, on this day we also look forward to the second coming of Christ when he will appear, not as a simple preacher on a humble donkey, but as our king and judge.

After the Divine Liturgy or later in the afternoon or evening, another beautiful service is held, called *Turnpatsek* or "Opening of the Doors." Originally meant to take place outside the door of the church, the service is now usually conducted at the altar with a drawn curtain. In this moving service, we knock on the door to the kingdom of God. "Open to us, Lord, the door of your mercy, we ask you with a lamenting voice," sings the deacon. From inside, someone asks, "Who are these to whom I may open, because this is the Lord's door and the righteous shall enter through it." And we answer, "Not only the just, but the sinners also through confession and repentance could come in after being justified." From inside, "Behold we see Christ, our Lord who . . . calls unto him those who do his will; 'where I am there shall also my servants be'. "And we reply," We are the price of God's Son's blood; let us praise our savior Christ joyfully and let us all say, glory to your awesome coming."

How can we enter through the door of righteousness into the kingdom of God? How can we be among those whom Christ calls unto him, who do his will? Jesus tells us in one of the Holy Week Gospel readings (Matthew 25:31-46). When he returns as Christ the king, he will sit on a throne surrounded by angels. All

of humanity will come before him to be judged. Who will be chosen for the kingdom? Christ says, "Those who gave me food when I was hungry, or drink when I was thirsty, or clothes when I was naked, or helped me when I was a stranger, or visited me when I was sick."

How can we do all this? We don't see Jesus hungry or thirsty or sick, do we? What we do see are other people. Every day in this world people go to bed hungry. People don't have enough clothes or a place to live. People are sick or dying and no one visits, no one cares. When we help these people, we are helping Jesus. We are doing what Jesus wants us to do. We are becoming one of the people that Christ will pick for kingdom.

Prayer

*Jesus, we welcome your coming into our hearts.
We have heard your message of helping others –
The poor and hungry, weak and homeless,
lonely and deserted.
May we work hard to help them, for when we do,
we are helping you.
And may we be worthy, when you return.
To have the doors of heaven opened for us
And to be chosen by you for your kingdom.*

For reflection:

Do I welcome Christ into my life every day? How?

Am I generous with what I have towards other people?

In what ways have I made a stranger feel welcome (in my parish, community, anywhere)?

Did you know . . .

The origin of Palm Sunday Vespers service is not precisely known. In the general Christian tradition, there was a ceremony of knocking at the gates in Jerusalem. In that custom, the clergy and congregation stood outside the city gates and the choir sang from inside. Both the form and the content of their "dialogue" find parallels in the more elaborate Armenian service.