

**HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH
SUNDAY, APRIL 9, 2023 PALM SUNDAY**

JOHN 12: 1-18

“THE CHILDREN OF PALM SUNDAY”

5 year old Tommy went to church with his family every Sunday. But on Palm Sunday he was sick, so he and his mother stayed home while the rest of the family went to church, excited about the annual palm procession. When they came home Tommy saw the palm branches his brother had gotten at church. He asked what that was all about and his brother told him, “Because it's Palm Sunday” “So why branches?”, asked Tommy. The brother explained, “Because today is the day Jesus rode in on a donkey and everyone waved palm branches at Him.” Tommy responded, “So Jesus showed up today with a donkey! Wow, that’s amazing! Here I go to church every Sunday.....and nothing big ever happens. Then the one Sunday I don’t go, Jesus Himself shows up and brings a donkey into the church!” (off the internet back in 2003)

Well, Tommy had it all a bit mixed up! But he had simple and deep faith--that Jesus can do anything: even show up at church with a donkey!

He isn’t going to show up at all our churches today with His donkey-----but as we just heard in our gospel reading from John 12, He did really ride into Jerusalem on a donkey 2000 years ago! And the children of Jerusalem, children like Tommy, got very excited!

The icon here in front shows little children as part of the Palm Sunday parade, celebrating our Lord’s entrance into Jerusalem. And in Matthew 21:15 (from the gospel reading earlier today in the Matins service), we find out that children followed Jesus later on Palm Sunday when He entered God’s temple. They were so excited about Christ that they hollered out praise to Him right in the temple. As St. Matthew puts it----“The children cried out in the temple----‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’” By calling Him the Son of David, the children were acknowledging Jesus Christ to be the Messiah, the Son of God.

And all this got the priests angry---that these children would be yelling right in the temple that Jesus, whom the priests hated, was the Messiah! They angrily said to the Lord, “Do you hear what they are saying?” Jesus heard

them, all right. And He was pleased by their excitement and their words. And he told the angry priests in verse 16 that the words of the children were “perfect praise.”

Jesus Christ is the king of all. Yet He rides in on a little donkey? It might seem more appropriate if the king rode in a beautiful chariot with a powerful army accompanying Him. But the children’s faith was strong enough to believe that even if He just had a humble donkey, this man was the King of all! So they praised Him loudly in the temple even if it made the priests angry.

May God help us today on Palm Sunday to have the kind of faith those little children had! The world seems to be getting darker and darker---wars, chaos, all the old beliefs about right and wrong being rejected, the immense sadness of the transgender movement, etc., etc..... And in the middle of it, here comes our Lord, the man who rode a donkey. He is the king of all---but on a donkey? Not really what we would expect from the king. And a king who dies on a cross? And so we must have faith like those children did so long ago.

Faith---that this man on a donkey really is the Lord.

Faith---that this man on a donkey, even in the midst of our time’s darkness, is still ultimately in charge. No matter how dark it might get.

Faith---that this man on a donkey will one day come back to our world. And He will put everything right and conquer evil forever.

On that first Palm Sunday the children were right....and the priests were wrong (not the only time priests have been wrong!). The children were right to believe in and worship the man who came into their city on a humble, smelly donkey.

But the priests were wrong---they just didn’t think someone on a donkey could be the Messiah. But the little ones, with childish faith, knew the truth. And they rejoiced that the Lord had come!

In a while, at the end of the liturgy, we will go outside in a celebration procession carrying palms. What we are actually saying by carrying a palm is this---“I agree with the children, not with the priests! That man on the donkey, as weak as He might seem---I believe in Him and I praise Him as my Lord and God!”