

## HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH

**APRIL 17, 2022**  
**PALM SUNDAY**  
**JOHN 12: 1-18**

### **“DECIDING”**

On the first Palm Sunday 2000 years ago there was great joy and excitement in Jerusalem. The people believed the man riding in on the donkey was their long awaited king! And so they paraded along with Him, they shouted “Hosanna!”, they waved palms in the air. In ancient times, to wave a palm was a sign of declaring loyalty to someone such as a king. And so they excitedly waved palms to show their loyalty to the man on the donkey.

But only 5 days later, the opinion of most in that crowd had changed. No palms 5 days later! By Friday, most had changed from fans of Jesus into enemies of Jesus. They had switched from hollering “Hosanna!” to hollering “Crucify Him!”.

The commitment to the Lord on Palm Sunday was obviously pretty shallow. On Sunday, they cheered. On Friday, they jeered. On Sunday, they wished to crown Him. On Friday, they wanted to kill Him!

And once they got their wish and He was hanging dying on a cross, many mocked Him. They had wanted a king who would destroy the hated Romans’ rule over Jerusalem. When they realized Jesus was not that kind of a king, not that kind of a Messiah, they concluded He was a fake Messiah. And now, in their hatred, they mocked Him as He died.

But not everyone at the cross that day mocked Jesus Christ. There were those who were loyal. We know who a few of them were..... Of course, there was His mother, the Blessed Theotokos. And there was the Beloved Disciple, St. John. And there was a thief on one of the crosses next to Him.....

Perhaps the worst thing about crucifixion was what a slow death it was. It was designed to be that way---to be the slowest and most painful death possible. And so that thief had lots of time that day---time to watch Jesus on the next cross, time to think about Jesus, time to decide about Him.

Jesus looked the same as any other man being crucified. Same nails, same shedding of blood, same difficulty breathing, same agonizing pain.

But the thief noticed some things different about Jesus. How He acted, what He said, how He took care of His mother, how He prayed..... How He prayed for forgiveness for the very soldiers who were torturing Him to death.

The thief, in the middle of his own horrible suffering, watched and listened to Jesus----and He came to realize that Jesus was not another criminal like he was. That He was very different. That He was innocent. That He was in control, even when on the cross. And eventually the thief came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah and the King. And not just any king----but the king of the whole creation!

And that realization led the thief to make an incredible leap of faith. And he cried out to Christ, “Jesus, remember when you come into Your Kingdom!” His new found faith

revealed to him the reality that Jesus, even though dying on the cross, was the King of all.

And Jesus replied to him, "Truly, I say to you ----today you will be with me in paradise."

The thief made his decision.....and he went to paradise, to be with God.

Choices, decisions----we all have to make them. On the first Palm Sunday, the crowd made a decision to be for Jesus. But it was obviously for many of them a shallow decision, a temporary decision. By Friday, they decided against Him. On Friday, the crowd made a very bad decision. But the thief made a very good decision.

Now it is our turn to decide. Our parents can't decide for us. Our godparents can't decide for us. Our friends can't decide for us. Your church can't decide for you. Your priest can't decide for you.

It's all on you! Each of us has to decide about Jesus Christ-----a decision no one else can make for us. We have to decide whether or not we wish to live for that man on the middle cross. Just like the thief had to decide----so do you, so do I.

Sometimes we try to avoid a clear decision.....Back in 1925 the Communists had been in control of Russia for some years. The Bolshevik Revolution had succeeded; the Reds had won the Civil War. The Communist leaders, however, were concerned about whether or not the Communist Party members were truly and totally devoted to the Communist cause. A simple survey wouldn't reveal much. So they came up with a program where members of the secret police would come up with excuses to pay casual visits to the homes of Communist Party members to get a candid inside glance at what their lives and beliefs were like. Many were not happy with some things they saw. They saw in many Communist homes a strange sight-----an icon of Jesus Christ on the wall with a candle by it; and next to it a photo of Communist founder Vladimir Lenin with a candle by it! Even many Party members were having a hard time deciding who they were really for---Jesus Christ or Vladimir Lenin! (The Whisperers, Orlando Figes, Metropolitan Books, 2007, p. 47)

Decision making can be hard for us too. Who and what are we deciding to dedicate our lives to?

On that Friday, it was time for the thief to decide. He decided for Jesus Christ. Today, Palm Sunday, is our day to decide. Who will I live the rest of my life for? To whom will I dedicate my existence?

In ancient times, carrying a palm was a way to show loyalty to a king. You will be carrying one outside at the end of today's liturgy. You will thus be openly saying to the world that you are a follower of Jesus of Nazareth.

Today is the day to make an important decision (or renew that decision if you've made it before!)----A decision of true loyalty to Christ. Not just a surface thing, not just a ceremony carrying a palm, but a true and real and total decision-----I wish for the man dying on that center cross to be my Lord and King.

Today is a good day to decide to follow the example of the thief and, along with him, to say to Christ with our whole heart---"Remember me, O Lord, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom!" And then He will remember you, and you will be with Him in His Kingdom forever!