

Palm Sunday – Cleansing of the Temple

*Delivered by Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian
St. Sarkis Armenian Church. Carrollton, TX
April 9, 2017
Gospel Reading: Matthew 20:29-21:17*

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today, Christians throughout the world celebrate the triumphant entrance of Christ into Jerusalem. We remember how Jesus sat on a donkey, and the crowds, going before and after Him, cut down palm branches and spread them on the road, all the while shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” Everyone was asking who this was and the answer was the prophet, Jesus of Nazareth.

This is where the story usually ends, but there is more. We heard in today’s Gospel reading how after Jesus entered Jerusalem, He then entered the temple and saw people selling and buying. The Gospel tells us that He drove them out of the temple, flipping tables and chairs of money changers and those selling doves. He then quoted the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’, but you have made it into a den of thieves.”

When we hear this passage, we think Jesus got mad because there was money in the temple, but that is not the case. If we examine how the temple was set up, we see that the money changers and those selling doves were a necessary part of the temple life and functions. Jews from all over the known world were coming to the temple with foreign, pagan (gentile) currency which was not allowed in the temple. So the money exchangers were needed. And it was normal and acceptable for animal sacrifices to be bought and sold because the animals needed to be perfect and pure.

So what enraged Jesus to the point of flipping tables and chairs? Two specific things: first, the worshippers were being exploited and valued only for their money, and second, God was being excluded from the temple, because monetary profit was more important than spiritual profits.

Sometimes we think we see this today in other churches and even in our own church. Sometimes we feel certain people are more concerned with what is in a person’s wallet and not what is in a person’s heart. We can become distracted by the luncheons, collection plates, candle offerings, general donations, ArmeniaFest sponsorship, pledge commitments,

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and even the new church. As a result, we tend to think that we only care about material things, but that is not the truth. We stress and emphasize all these things so that we can have a church that works, and have ministries that serve every parishioner.

But how do we change this impression? We need to follow Christ's example. No, we should not go around flipping tables and chairs, but living His words, "My house shall be called a house of prayer." This does not just refer to the church, but to each and every one of us. St. Paul writes, "You are the temple of God" (I Cor. 3:16) and "Your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit" (I Cor. 6:19). If we want the church and our church to be a house of prayer, we ourselves must first become houses of prayer. Our souls' one and only purpose should be for prayer. We must create atmospheres of prayer and strive for spiritual profit in our lives.

I know that we are houses of prayer, but sometimes we become distracted with what is going on around us. We must not allow the outside world to affect the prayer that takes place within us. Yet, if we see another who is more concerned about someone's wealth or money, let us speak to them with love and kindness, explaining that all those things (wealth, money, and material objects) will all pass away one day, but our souls will remain forever.

So as we continue to celebrate Jesus Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, let us remember His triumphant entry into the temple, and ultimately into our lives. Let us make prayer a priority in our lives and not allow our purpose, being houses of prayer, to be changed.

Amen.