

## ***“Fear Not”***

In these days of heightened anxiety, and shortened services – we can get right to the point – just like our text for today – just like the Church’s calendar for Holy Week. The cries of “hosanna” are quickly replaced with the cries of “crucify.” And why is this? Why the sudden and dramatic change? Fear.

The Pharisees and church leaders are afraid. The Pharisees see that what they have been doing isn’t working. People are flocking after Jesus. The ruling priests and the Pharisees have already had their meeting. They’re afraid that Jesus is getting out of hand – and if they don’t stop Him – the Romans will come and take away their place. Life as they know it is turned upside down, destroyed. So they plot the death of Jesus Christ.

Fear drives people to do things they wouldn’t think of doing otherwise. Someone afraid for their life might end up supporting legislation they normally would oppose – but because of the emergency nature of the matter – fear drives them to give up civil liberties, to support massive spending bills, to rack up massive debt.

I’m not saying this to be political – but simply to point out how fear drives us to do things we normally wouldn’t do. This doesn’t just happen in politics – it happens in people’s personal lives as well. For instance, a person who opposes abortion – might be afraid their actions and sins will be exposed – so fear drives them to seek an abortion in order to hide their sin.

A more common example might be, those people who often remind others (parents do this) that “honesty is the best policy” – but then they schwaflle on the truth – because they’re afraid of how others might respond to the truth. They fear their honesty, the truth, might alienate others (especially their family members).

If we are honest, we find ourselves acting out of fear. Our fears drive us to do irrational things. Our fears increase our anxiety and fill us with trepidation. Our fears lead us to hide, or even take unnecessary risks. Our fears at times lead to great sorrow and regret.

You have heard me say many times over the past few weeks – that we are to “Fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” You are called to live in faith, not fear. However, FAITH includes FEAR – the most proper fear there is – the fear of God above all things.

And yet, faith isn’t built on such fear. Faith is built on trust – it is built on actions of grace and mercy. Faith sees that God is to be feared above all things, because God is greater than all things – but faith ultimately rests upon God’s promises. Faith focuses on, and takes to heart, His promises.

Today you hear God’s promise – and you see the fulfillment. St. John records the words of the prophet Zechariah. “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion” – or – as John writes in his gospel, “Fear not, daughter of Zion.” Don’t be afraid, but rejoice. Why? Because God is coming to you – not to destroy you, but to deliver you.

What a stark contrast with the religious leaders who are shaking in their boots when Jesus comes riding into town. What a contrast with our own sinful nature – which tends to dive behind bushes (like the Garden of Eden) when we hear God coming. Fear drives us to hide from God – and now, today – we hear that God is coming to us again!

But faith sees Him for who He is – our gracious Lord and Savior. He comes as our King to rule over us – but He comes in great humility! He comes – not in war and judgment, giving us what we deserve – but with His grace, so that we might have peace. So rejoice! Don’t be afraid! “Fear not!”

What a blessing it is that Christ comes riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, surrounded by the rejoicing crowds. He came, not for the accolades – but for one purpose – to be crucified, to lay down His life, to die so that you might live.

He comes Jerusalem and to the cross to redeem us. “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” Lifted up on the cross – Jesus is all sin and all sinners reduced to One. In that one man, the Son of God shed His blood as the sacrifice that atones for the sin of the whole world.

Fear not, dearly beloved – for you are redeemed in the blood of Jesus Christ. You are washed in His blood – cleansed from all your iniquity – holy in God’s sight. You have been released from the prison-house of fear. Fear is no longer your master, your brutal taskmaster.

Dearly beloved – God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is your Lord – to be feared, loved, and trusted above all things. Yes, He is to be feared. We cannot soft-pedal this truth. He holds all things in His almighty hands and could wipe all mankind from the face of the earth in the blink of an eye – but He is gracious and merciful – giving instead, His Son to suffer and die – so that you may live.

In this faith we rejoice – we celebrate – even as the world mourns in the darkness and shadows of fear. In these days, Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, shines on you – and through you – so that others might see the Light of Christ, be set free from fear, and join with the whole Christian Church on earth to rejoice in the salvation that is ours, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.