

FOLLOW ME

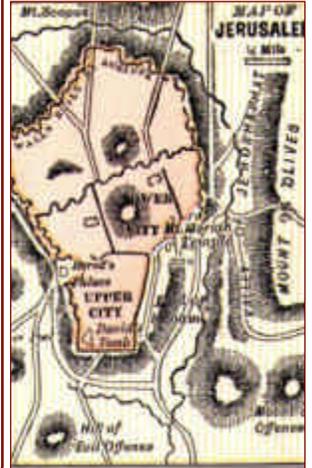
LESSON FOURTEEN: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK 11



FAST FACTS

- Jesus commanded His Disciples to obtain a specific colt on which He would enter Jerusalem.
- The crowd shouted “Hosanna” to Jesus, and placed palms and branches before Him.
- Jesus cursed a fig tree that, while full with leaves, was not producing figs.
- Jesus cleansed the Temple of moneychangers and dishonest salesmen.
- Jesus taught that we must pray with complete faith in God.
- He further taught that we must forgive others for their transgressions against us.
- The religious leaders questioned Jesus’ authority, but would not answer His questions about the source of St. John the Baptist’s authority to baptize.

MAP

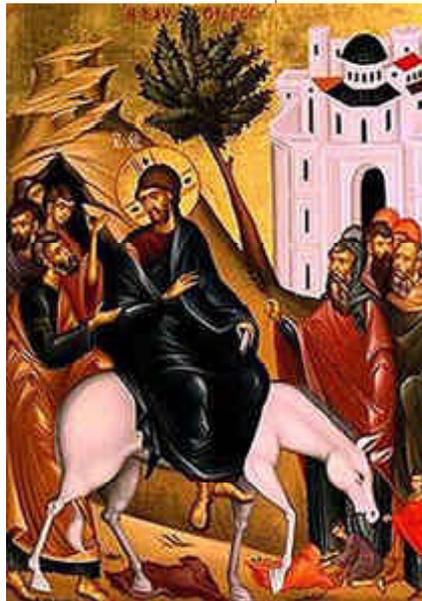


MARK 11:1-11

Throughout most of this Gospel account St. Mark shows Jesus commanding others to refrain from announcing that He is the Messiah. As He entered Jerusalem, however, Jesus publicly fulfilled the prophecy from the Holy Prophet Zechariah regarding the coming of the Messiah: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9; cf. Matthew 21:4-5).

The donkey ridden by Jesus tells us a great deal about Him. The fact that Jesus rode a donkey — as opposed to a horse, or in a chariot — shows that Jesus came as the Messiah of peace; Venerable Bede explains, “[The people] had a king who was gentle, for it was not God’s pleasure to give an earthly kingdom to the powerful, but a heavenly kingdom to the gentle.” The fact that the donkey had never been ridden further tells us that this was a special event (see Numbers 19:2; Deuteronomy 21:3; 1 Samuel 6:7): the King entered His city to bring salvation.

The cry of the people, “Hosanna,” literally means, “Save now.” Taken from Psalm 118:25-26, “Hosanna” was



OUR FAITH TEACHES

Fr. Alkiviadis Calivas explains part of the significance of Palm Sunday:

Palm Sunday summons us to behold our king: the Word of God made flesh. We are called to behold Him not simply as the One who came to us once riding on a colt, but as the One who is always present in His Church, coming ceaselessly to us in power and glory at every Eucharist, in every prayer and sacrament, and in every act of love, kindness and mercy. He comes to free us from all our fears and insecurities, “to take solemn possession of our soul, and to be enthroned in our heart,” as someone has said. He comes not only to deliver us from our deaths by His death and resurrection, but also to make us capable of attaining the most perfect fellowship or union with Him. He is the king, who liberates us from the darkness of sin and the bondage of death. Palm Sunday summons us to behold our

king: the vanquisher of death and the giver of life.

sung by faithful Jews at Passover. The palms and branches spread by the crowd before Jesus are symbolic of the salvation brought by Him: palm branches symbolized victory, while the branches (most likely olive branches) symbolized anointing and peace. These were appropriate for the Messiah Who would gain victory over death.

MARK 11:12-14, 20-26

Many people misunderstand Jesus' cursing the fig tree, believing that it shows either that He was cruel for withering an innocent tree, or naïve for not understanding that fig trees bore fruit in the late spring and autumn. In reality, however, Jesus engaged in this action to teach His followers an important lesson.

The fig tree was a common image in the Old Testament for Israel, the people of God (see Hosea 9:10; Nahum 3:12). While the fig tree appeared like it would be producing fruit (it already had all its leaves (v. 13), it was barren; likewise, God's people were not bearing spiritual fruit from their relationship with Him (as can be seen from their general lack of acceptance of Jesus). Just as Jesus condemned the fig tree, the people of God who did not bear fruit were also going to be condemned. We shouldn't understand this condemnation to simply be a rejection of the people in Jerusalem: God expects Christians to bear fruit from our relationship with Him (see Galatians 5:22-23), and we will face a similar judgment if we do not bear spiritual fruit (see John 15:1-8).

MARK 11:15-19, 27-33

Jesus went to the Temple expecting to find a place of prayer and worship, but instead found a busy marketplace in which moneychangers and salesmen cheated Jews who purchased items to offer to God. David Hewitt points out that, while a pair of doves cost approximately seven cents outside the Temple, the salesmen inside the Temple courtyard charged as much as \$1.50. Jesus explained to His Disciples that He cleansed the Temple because it was supposed to be a house of prayer (Isaiah 56:7), but had instead been turned into a "den of robbers" (Jeremiah 7:11).

These actions and teachings by Jesus disturbed the Pharisees and Sadducees, who asked where Jesus received the authority to disrupt Temple sales and con-

LOOK AT YOURSELF

Pay special attention to what Jesus says about prayer in vv. 22-24: these verses are some of the keys to effective prayer. First, He tells us to pray with full confidence that God will hear and answer our prayers. Jesus tells us that God will provide all necessary things to those who seek Him (Matthew 6:25-34; Luke 12:22-31), and the Holy Apostle Paul tells us that "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28); we can therefore be confident that God will answer our prayers and give us what we need (but not, however, necessarily what we *think* we need).

Second, Jesus tells us that the effectiveness of our prayer is determined in part by our relationship with others. St. Gregory the Great writes, "Paul writes that 'love is patient and kind.' It is patient in bearing the evils done to us by others, and it is kind in even loving those it bears with. Jesus himself tells us: 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute and calumniate you.' Virtue in the sight of others is to bear with those who oppose us, but virtue in God's sight is to love them. This is the only sacrifice acceptable to God."

demn the leaders who allowed these dishonest practices. Jesus, using a common rabbinical practice, answered their question about authority with another question: from where did St. John the Baptist derive his authority to baptize? The leaders cannot affirm that St. John received his authority from God (because then they would need to recognize the One for whom St. John prepared the way), but neither can they deny St. John's authority (because this would mean criticizing someone who was very popular in first-century Judea). They therefore said nothing.

Jesus wasn't simply playing a game: He was instead challenging the leaders' reason for questioning Him. He was asking, as Hewitt puts it, "Are you prepared to recognize God-given authority when you see it?" They clearly were not.



WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS?

- Do I feel about Jesus the way the crowd did when He entered Jerusalem? How should I worship God on Palm Sunday (and other Sundays)?
- What do Jesus' actions with the fig tree teach me about spiritual fruit in my life, and about how I should pray?
- Do I hate someone, or have a grudge because of something someone did? If so, what impact does this have on my relationship with God?
- Do I recognize Jesus' authority? How should I respond to Him?

