

THE LORD COMING AS KING

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Reading: Matthew 21:1-16

You have heard the story of how the Lord was welcomed into Jerusalem as a King. Can you see this in your imagination? The picture in your mind of the Lord entering Jerusalem is important. It shows how the Lord is received in the New Church by each one of us. Jerusalem in the Word means “church,” and especially the center of the church, which is the Lord’s teachings. This is not hard to understand. A church is made up of those who go into it and live in it, the way citizens live in a city. Just as we may move to a city, or else be born in it, we also can come into the church or be born in it.

What makes the church is the teachings of the Lord in His Word. We are members of the church when we learn the teachings of the Word and obey them. This is why the church is like a city of teachings: to live in, to be defended by in temptation, and to enjoy.

But there are two ways of living in Jerusalem. One is only on the outside. And one is on the inside as well. When the Lord entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, many, many people greeted Him as their King. Only five days later, most of them turned against Him and demanded to have Him crucified. What went wrong? Many of the people loved the Lord only on the outside, and not at all on the inside. In fact, on the inside, they had a burning hatred of Him.

This hatred came out when the Lord told them the truth and when it became clear that the Lord would not do what the people wanted Him to do. They wanted Him to take worldly power and, by miracles, overcome the Romans and make every Jew rich and powerful. Instead, He came to show us the truth and to teach us to obey the Commandments, so that He could be King in our hearts. As the Lord said to Pilate, “My Kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

The Lord has all power. He did not need to be a King in this world. He wants His kingdom to be made of those who love Him. When we obey the truth, then He is King over us from the inside. When the crowds in Jerusalem joined against Him, they did not take away from the Lord’s power. Those who wanted to kill Him destroyed themselves, because they chose to hate, instead of choosing to love. But we will try not to do as they did. We will try to receive the Lord from within, not only from without.

When the Lord entered Jerusalem, He was riding on a donkey. The disciples put their clothes over the animal and the Lord was sitting on top. To ride on a donkey may not seem like the sign of a king to us. But to the Jews it was. Solomon, for example, rode on King David's donkey when he was made king. People knew this and so they put their clothes on the road for the Lord to ride on. They also cut branches from the trees and spread them before Him. Everyone was happy and shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest" (Matthew 21:9). The whole city was stirred up.

Where was this King to go? Did He go to Pilate's palace to claim the right to be King of the Jews? No. Instead, He went to the temple. He threw out the people who were trading there. He told them they were making the temple of God a den of robbers. They were using what was the Lord's to gain money for themselves. The Lord healed the blind and the lame who came to Him in the temple. But the chief priests and scribes were angry because of this and because the children cried out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David."

The Lord did not come to free the Jews from Roman rule. He came to cleanse the temple—the house of God—from false worship. He comes to us, too. He looks in our hearts and tells us what selfish things to throw out. Like the crowd, we may happily receive Him riding into Jerusalem at first. But will we accept that He cleanses the temple of our mind? If we accept this cleansing of our minds from selfishness, then we will be able to shout, "Hosanna to the Son of David. He is our King forever."