

PALM SUNDAY

Rt. Rev. George de Charms

Lessons: Luke 19:28-40, Arcana Coelestia 2781:8, 9

Today we celebrate the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the day that has come to be called "Palm Sunday". You remember the story, how, on Sunday, the first day of the week, five days before He was crucified, the Lord was journeying with His disciples from Jericho to Jerusalem. When they came to Bethany, the Lord sent two of His disciples ahead to the village of Bethphage, saying that there they would find an inn, at a point where two roads met. Outside the inn they would see a donkey tied, while his master was resting. The Lord told His disciples to loose the donkey, and bring it to Him. If the owner asked them what they were doing, they were to tell him that the Lord had need of the donkey, and he would let them take it.

The disciples found everything as the Lord had said, and when they had returned with the donkey, they took off their outer garments and laid them on the donkey, so the Lord might ride on it. So it was they went on their way toward Jerusalem, the Lord riding on the donkey. And the disciples were glad, for they knew this was a sign that the Lord was to be crowned king. It was an old custom among that people that when a king was to be crowned, he should ride on a donkey while his followers cheered him, proclaimed him king, and sang, "Hosanna.... Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" (Matthew 21:5).

So it was now, when the Lord and His disciples drew near to the gates of Jerusalem, everyone who saw them remembered the ancient rite of coronation, and thought that the Lord was to be crowned king. And it happened that a great multitude of people, who had come from all parts of the land to the Feast of the Passover, had set out from Jerusalem to visit the home of Lazarus in Bethany, because they had heard that the Lord had raised him from the dead, and they wanted to see him and talk with him. But as they came out of the east gate, the Lord and His disciples were drawing near. And when they saw the Lord riding on a donkey, and heard the singing of the ancient song, they forgot about Lazarus and turned back to enter the city and witness what they thought would be the coronation ceremony. As they went they cut down palm branches, waved them before the Lord, and strewed them in the road in front of Him as they sang, " Hosanna.... Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!".

When they came into the city, however, the Lord was not crowned King. He merely went into the temple, as He had done many times before, to teach; and

presently, the crowd, greatly disappointed, broke up and went to their homes. The Lord had not come to be made a king in this world. He could not be the king of any one country, for He is the King of Kings, the ruler over the whole universe. This the multitudes did not know, nor did the disciples know. But later, when He rose on Easter morning, all who saw Him knew that He was indeed a Heavenly King and that His Kingdom was over all people.

But why do you suppose the disciples and the multitude cut down palm branches? Why did they not use oak branches, or olive branches, or the branches of any other tree? It was because in very ancient times, when this custom of crowning a king was first established, people knew what palm trees and palm branches meant. They knew that in heaven wherever there are angels who are eager to learn the truth of the Word, and so to become wise, there palm trees grow. Swedenborg one day wanted to go to the Temple of Wisdom, and an angel came by the Lord's permission to show him the way. He found this Temple on a high mountain, and as he drew near to it he passed through a large grove of beautiful palm trees. On another occasion, he went to visit a school where young men were being taught wisdom by the angels. This school also was on a mountain, and as Swedenborg ascended he passed through a forest of palm trees that covered the mountain right up to its top. And on the very top of the mountain the trees themselves formed a sort of temple, their great branches meeting as they arched overhead. And here were both Spirits and angels seeking wisdom through the study of the Lord's Word.

This is why, when a king was crowned in ancient times, those who went with him to the temple and then to the royal palace strewed palm branches in the way. This is a sign that they wanted Him to be their king, and to teach them, and lead them, and protect them from their enemies. It was a sign that they knew he had been anointed by the Lord, and that through him, the Lord would rule over them.

All people who love the Lord and want Him to rule over them wish to learn from the Word what the Lord would have them do. They want the Lord to teach them out of His Word, and to lead them in all that they think, and in all that they do. Those who do this can receive wisdom from the Lord, and the Lord can give them the joy and happiness of heaven. So this is what we should think about on Palm Sunday. We should think of how much we love the Lord, how much we want Him to be our King, how much we want Him to teach us, and make us wise from His Word. Then will we be like those who followed Him, so long ago, cutting down palm branches, and strewing them in the way, and singing, "Hosanna.... Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" And then will we come, in the other world, among those angels who dwell among the palm trees, and will find our way to the Temple of Wisdom, on the top of that beautiful mountain, where Swedenborg visited those who were seeking wisdom from the Lord by studying His Word.