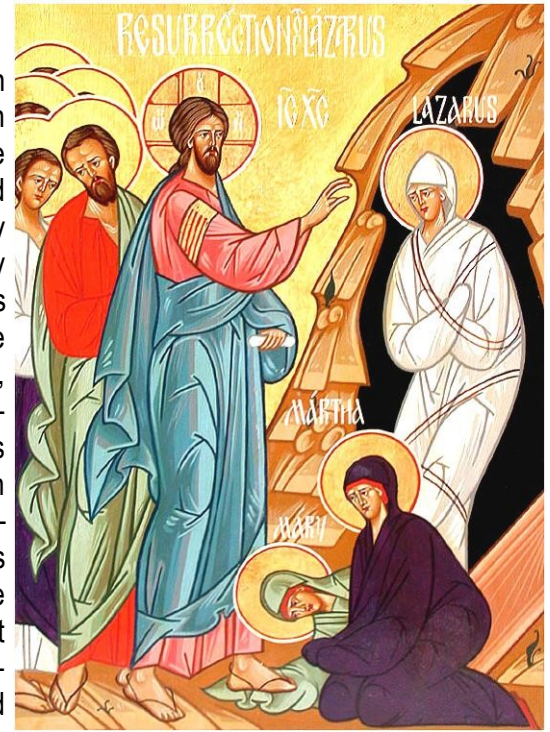


## Lazarus Saturday & Flowery (Willow) Sunday

This day, along with Flowery (Palm) Sunday, occupies a special position between the Great Fast which ends the day before, and Great Week which begins the day after Flowery Sunday. Following the forty days of penitence which have just ended, and immediately before the days of darkness and mourning which are to follow in Passion Week, there comes two days of joy and triumph on which the Church is festive. The Saturday before Flowery Sunday celebrates the raising of Lazarus at Bethany (John 11:1-44). This miracle is performed by Christ as a reassurance to His disciples before the coming Passion. They are to understand that, though He suffers and dies, yet He is the Lord and Victor over Death. The raising of Lazarus is a prophecy in the form of action. It foreshadows Christ's own Resurrection eight days later, and at the same time it anticipates the resurrection of the righteous on the Last Day: *The saving first-fruits of the regeneration of the world* (1 Corinthians 15). The liturgical texts emphasize that the miracle at Bethany reveals the two natures of Christ Who is both Human and God. Christ asks where Lazarus is laid and weeps for him showing the fullness of His humanity for it involves human ignorance and genuine grief for a beloved friend. Then, disclosing the fullness of His divine power, He raises Lazarus from the dead even though his corpse has already begun to decompose and stink. This double fullness of Christ's divinity and humanity should be kept in mind throughout Great Week, and above all on Great Friday. We perceive a genuine human agony on the Cross which is both physical and mental. However, we see more than this; we behold not only a suffering human being, but also a suffering God!



## Flower, Palm or Willow Sunday, The Entrance of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ into Jerusalem

Seven days before we celebrate Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts, the Church commemorates the Entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem. He entered in triumph having just raised His friend Lazarus from the dead in Bethany, a village that is a mere two miles outside of Jerusalem. Many Jewish believers were in Jerusalem that time in order to celebrate the Jewish Passover. Word of this great miracle spread quickly and they came to greet Him as He entered the Holy City. However, our Lord did not enter as a military leader on a horse with troops, but as a humble servant seated on the colt of a donkey to fulfill a prophecy Zechariah made centuries before the birth of Christ!

When He entered Jerusalem, He was greeted by the Hebrew people who spread their garments on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Though each Gospel account has a slight variation on what the crowd shouted, it was basically the same chant that we use during the Divine Liturgy: "Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!" Hosanna is a Hebrew word which roughly means, "Please save us." Seven days before His ultimate victory, He was already being greeted as the Savior, but also as the Most High coming in the Name of the Lord, meaning that He speaks and acts with the authority of God. This is what upset the religious leaders so greatly.

The Gospel accounts mention that the people spread branches before Him. In Matthew and Mark, it does not specify what type of branches. It is for this reason that in Mediterranean countries, branches from olive and fig trees are blessed in addition to palms. In Ukraine, where there are no palm trees, an even more interesting practice developed: Blessing pussy willow branches because the pussy willow is the first bud of the Spring, the first sign of new life. In pre-Christian Ukraine, the pussy willow was already revered as a magical plant for this reason. In a truly meaningful transition, Ukrainians and other Slavic people began blessing these branches on the Sunday in which the New Life promised by Christ Jesus was beginning to spring forth. This is the reason we carry them as symbols of victory, victory over sin and Death!

Accordingly, this Sunday has many names: Flowery Sunday, Palm Sunday, Willow Sunday or Sunday of the branches. There is also a quaint Ukrainian folk custom in which the people playfully strike each other with their pussy willow branches. When doing this they say something to the effect of, "I strike you now as a remembrance of our Lord's suffering and Passion in anticipation of Pascha, which we will soon celebrate together!"

*"Today the grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us together, and we all take up your Cross and say: Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest."*

### **Entry Of Our Lord Into Jerusalem (Willow Sunday)**

**Troparion:** Giving us before Your Passion an assurance of the general resurrection, You have raised Lazarus, **Christ** our God. Therefore, like the children we also carry symbols of victory \* and cry to You, the **Conqueror of Death: Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord.**

**Kontakion:** Seated in heaven upon Your Throne \* and on earth upon a **colt**, Christ our God, You have accepted the praise of the angels \* and the songs of the children who **cried** out to You: Blessed are You Who comes to recall Adam!

### **Why is this day called Palm or Willow Sunday?**

In memory of our Savior's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, when the people strewed palm branches before Him, for which reason the Church, on this day, blesses palms, and carries them in procession.

### **Why does our church use pussy willows instead of palms like everybody else?**

Our forefathers lived in Ukraine where palms were not available, so they substituted the branches of the pussy willow trees that were plentiful and abundant in that region. They were also the first bud of the Spring, the first sign of new life after a long winter. Pre-Christians Ukrainians also thought Pussy Willows possessed magical powers because of this. When the Slavic people became Christian, they retained this symbol of new life and related it to the New Life which is the result of Christ's Resurrection.

### **Why are the palms and pussy willows blessed?**

Those who carry them with devotion,, or keep them in their houses receive protection of soul and body, as prayer for in the blessing and that those who carry the palms may, by means of the prayers of the Church, adorn their souls with good works and this, in spirit, meet the Savior; that, through Christ whose members we are, we may conquer the kingdom of death and darkness, and be made worthy to share in His glorious resurrection and triumphant entrance into heaven. St. Augustine writes of the palms: "They are symbols of praise, and a sign of victory, because the Lord by death conquered death, and with the sign of victory, the cross, overcame the devil, the prince of death." Therefore, preceded by the cross, we go in procession singing hymns of praise.

### **Why did Jesus enter Jerusalem so solemnly and yet so humbly?**

To show that He was the promised Messiah and King of the Jews, as foretold by the Prophet Zacharias (9:9), and that He had come to conquer the world, the flesh and the devil, for which He used the weapons of meekness, humility, and poverty and therefore came seated not on a proud steed but like a poor person on the weak colt of a donkey, entering Jerusalem in all humility, this teaching us that meekness and indifference to earthly goods are our weapons to gain victory over our enemies. Jesus entered Jerusalem so humbly to protect the type of Paschal lamb, for on this day the lambs which were to be sacrificed in the temple on the following Friday, were solemnly led into the city. Thus, Jesus like a meek lamb, entered the city of Jerusalem to be sacrificed for us.

### **Why did the people meet Christ with palm branches?**

This happened by the inspiration of God, to indicate that Christ, the Conqueror of Death, the abyss, and the devil, would reconcile man with God, and open the heavenly Jerusalem to him, for the palm is the emblem of victory and peace. By this we learn also the inconsistency of the world; for the very people who on this day met Christ with palm branches exclaiming: "Hosanna to the Son of David", a few days later shouted: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Learn from this to despise the praise of the world, and be careful not to imitate the inconsistency of this people by crucifying Him again and again by sin (Hebrews 6:6), after having received Him with joy in Holy Communion.



***Why should we receive the palms and pussy willows on this day?***

With the pious intention of meeting Christ in spirit, with the devout people of Jerusalem, adoring Him, saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David, Hosanna to Him who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!" and with heartfelt prayer to Jesus for His grace, that with Him we may conquer the world, the flesh and the devil and be received into the heavenly Jerusalem where He is truly a King.

***What do we do with the pussy willows?***

The pussy willows are blessed by the priest with holy water and prayer. This blessing is called a sacramental. The willows should be received reverently and taken home and placed in special vases or behind icons and crucifixes, and on your special family altar. The pussy willows can be taken to the cemetery where they are placed on the graves of our loved ones. In some churches, the willows are placed in the casket, along with the icon of the Resurrection of Christ, indicating that we desire to be accepted into the heavenly Jerusalem by the Resurrected Christ.