*O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His steadfast love endures forever! Let Israel say: “His steadfast love endures forever.” Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank You that You have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we beseech You, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech You, give us success! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless You from the house of the Lord. The Lord is God, and He has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give thanks to You; You are my God; I will extol You. O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.* Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

*When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them: “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this: ‘The Lord needs them.’ And He will send them immediately.” This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet: “Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks on them, and He sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of Him and that followed were shouting: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” When He entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking: “Who is this?” The crowds were saying: “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.* Matthew 21:1-11

*One Sunday afternoon, Pastor's wife dropped into an easy chair saying: "Boy! Am I ever tried."*

*Her husband looked over at her and said: "I had to conduct two special services last night, three today, and give a total of five sermons. Why are you so tired?"*

*The wife replied: “And I had to listen to all of them."*

Turn Defeat into Victory.

1. Following the victorious war, the Roman commanders were honored by the Empire with what was called a “Triumph.” This *“Triumphus Romanus”* was regarded as a civil ceremony and a religious rite. According to the historians, the victorious commander, wearing a crown of laurel leaves and an all-purple, gold-embroidered triumphal toga, the regalia that identified him as near-divine or near-kingly on the day of his triumph, rode in a four-horse chariot through the streets of Rome with a procession of his soldiers, and his captives as well as the spoils of war. Then, he would enter the Jupiter's temple, where he would offer a sacrifice and the tokens of his victory to this Roman god of war. On that day the *“victor”* was recognized as a *“conqueror,”* and this made him the most important figure of the day in the entire Empire, even more important that Caesar.

2. Today, we may not witness the *“victory parades”* on the scale the Romans did, but following every major sporting competition as the society we extend a similar recognition to the winners of the sporting or another important public event. Every *“Superbowl,” “World Series”* or *“Stanley Cup,”* winners enjoy the sort of a *“Parade”* in their home towns, as the Roman warriors did in Rome. For a day these athletes are also regarded the *“rulers of a day,”* often presented with the key to the city, the custom deeply rooted in the ancient tradition. Not so long ago our astronauts were also recognized in such a way. This sort of the *“hero worship”* still exists within modern society.

3. Jesus’ entering Jerusalem, the event otherwise known as a *“Triumphal Entry,”* which we celebrate today on the *“Palm Sunday,”* must be understood as that sort of event. It is necessary to see this if we are to understand the cheerful mood of the crowd and the lack of any military response from the Roman soldiers stationed in Jerusalem. Jesus’ triumphal entry was not an unusual expression of the approval, offered in particular to a popular person. Entering Jerusalem Jesus was recognized as a royalty, someone who on this day was the most important public figure in the city. He was not however perceived by the Romans as a *“threat”* to their rule. Jesus never claimed to be an earthly king and He never claimed His kingdom to be of this world. In His triumphal entry He accepts the title of a *“king,”* but He knows that He is the *“spiritual royalty.”* The title: *“Son of David,”* was associated with the *“Messiah”* and the *“Messiah,”* – the *“Deliverer,”* according to the Scriptures was but of a spiritual nature, although over the centuries the Jews changed the definition of the *“Messiah”* and wanted to see the *“Messiah”* to be a true, *“warrior-like”* character. Thus, finally when the Messiah came, they did not recognize Jesus for who He truly was.

4. Now, let us look at the ways Jesus enters Jerusalem. What He does is very much unlike any military victor would do. He is not riding the *“four horse chariot,” nor even a stallion,* but instead He rides on a donkey, not a very much *“warriorlike”* mount. He does not behave as a military commander, proud of His achievements would do, but instead He weeps over the fate of Jerusalem as He approaches the city, and no soldier of the day would even dare to show such an emotion, even if he felt one, in the front of people, much less a commanding officer. His entry resembles the entrance of a peaceful man. As a matter-of-fact Jesus was indeed called the *“Prince of Peace”* not a *“Prince of War,”* long before He was even born.He enters the city not with a mighty army, not with the captives or with the *“spoils of war,”* but rather with a small group of disciples among whom only one, Peter, the Zealot, a member of the secret society trying to free their homeland from the Roman invaders, might be somehow considered a warrior.

5. All the followers of Jesus were ordinary people. Not one of them was a soldier. Not one of them was a rich person and the wealthiest of them would’ve probably been Matthew, the former tax-collector. Not one of them was a scholar, only later on some scholars like Nicodemus or Paul, would follow Jesus’ teachings. Like most of us they lived with fears of uncertainty, faced doubts, and experienced emotional ups and downs of life. Yet, Jesus called them to follow Him because He wanted to change the world using the most ordinary people possible. If Jesus would call the rich and famous, the powerful and influential, He would alienate the vast majority of people, because the majority of people in the world are the poor and the ordinary. If He would call the powerful, the change He wanted to see in the world would have been forced upon the people and would not have been widely accepted. When the powerful emperor Constantine imposed Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire, the corruption entered the Church and the abuse we still witness in the Church today took hold of so many people and of the system.

6. The crowds greeting Jesus saw in Him a *“victorious king”* such as David was, but Jesus is much greater than David and He is far superior to any other *“victor,”* then or even now. In the euphoria of the day the crowd did not remember that in the eyes of God, David was not worthy to build the Temple, the House of the Lord. He might have been a mighty king and a warrior, but he was unacceptable to God to build God’s House. Jesus’ *“triumphal entry”* thus became a defeat of the ideas of the people of the Old Testament. Until now Jesus was fulfilling the teachings of the Old Testament, proving that they misunderstood what the Scriptures taught, and misread God’s will for them and the world. The people’s *“Hosannas”* and cheering for Jesus once again show how badly they misunderstood and misread God, placing human wisdom above God’s. Today’s Church descends from the Church that was established while Jesus entered Jerusalem. Today’s Church descend from the Church of pre-Constantine era. Jesus entering Jerusalem shows that He wanted the world to be changed by what obviously seemed to be weak and unimportant. Unfortunately, nobody, not even His disciples paid true attention to His action. Everyone wanted to see in Him what they were concerned with and did not want to hear what He has to say.

7. Jesus could have created the Church with His divine powers, with His *“Heavenly Army,”* instead He called for the establishment of the Church by the imperfect people. Remember the song: *“He could have called ten thousand angels, but He died alone, for you and me.”* Jesus had the ability, but He did not use His ability, because the Church was to be created from within by the ordinary people. The Church’s strength must derive from her weakness. It is easy to conquer with an army, with the might and the power, but it is very difficult to bring people together through peaceful means. As humanity we prefer aggression and conquest, while Jesus brought the victory to the people not because He was a *“mighty warrior,”* but because He was a *“peaceful savior.”* His actions united people even though they were and still are so different. He allows people to live together without worrying about the future’s outcomes. The only requirement for us is to accept His Spirit and to allow Him to work in us, to guide us and lead us to the perfect, ultimate solutions.

8. Jesus brought a new vision *“to”* and *“of”* the new world. In this world the Spirit is more important than the letter. In His world the acceptance of God comes from people’s heart and not from their actions – the religious zeal and the religious bigotry. From the moment Jesus entered Jerusalem, He offered us safety of the eternity. We are not able to change ourselves, only Jesus can do this, but only if we allow Him to take charge of our lives. As humanity we are violent, greedy, hungry for power, and unable to transform ourselves on our own, we need Christ to transform us. When we change ourselves, the results are what we so clearly see today in what our society embraces, calls, and cheers for. Unless we allow Jesus to transform us, we are still like Adam and Eve convinced by Satan to follow in a sinful life. When He enters the city, Jesus enters a new era of the world affairs. Because of His *“Triumphal Entry,”* the world must either accept Him and flourish or reject Him and plunge into the sinful and corrupt evil life. There is no middle ground; there is no sitting on the fence *“playing both sides against the middle.”* Just before His ascension Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to direct us, to motivate us and to lead us. We are to be controlled not by the religious leaders and the religious rituals, but by the Holy Spirit. All this is possible because He entered Jerusalem ultimately as a true *“victor,”* even though on Good Friday He will appear to be *“defeated.”* We call this day a *“Triumphal Entry”* Sunday, a *“Palm Sunday,”* but ultimately, following the Easter Sunday Jesus proves to be *“victorious”* already then, on the day when He entered Jerusalem for the last time.