Sunday, April 5, 2026 | Palm Sunday

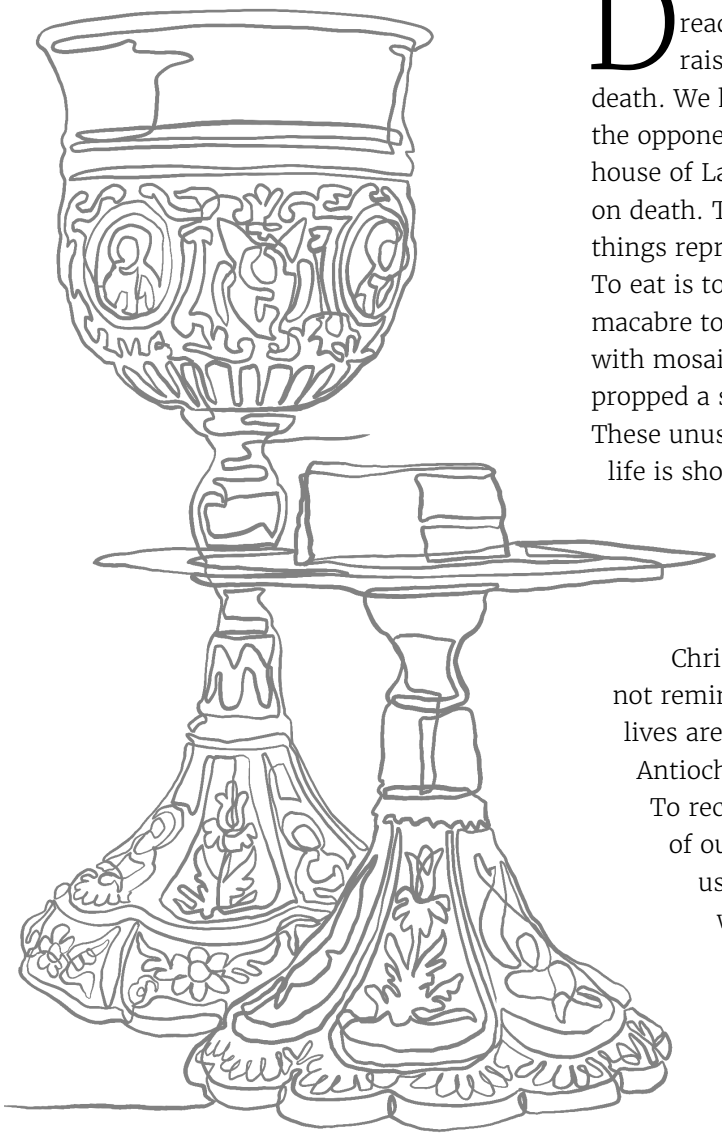
# DIAKONIA

*A National Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America*

**REFLECTIONS FROM TODAY'S READING – *John 12: 1-18***

## "The Medicine of Immortality"

**Fr. George Parsenios**



Dining and death are closely connected in today's Gospel reading. Death pervades the passage. We hear that Lazarus was raised from the dead. We then hear that Jesus is anointed for death. We hear, finally, that Lazarus is marked for murder, because the opponents of Jesus are jealous of his renown. And a meal in the house of Lazarus provides the background for this pervasive focus on death. The ancients often joined dining and death because these things represent two poles of the human experience. To eat is to live. To eat is to push death back for one more day. Although it may sound macabre to us, ancient Roman dining rooms were often decorated with mosaics of skeletons, and the ancient Egyptians are said to have propped a skeleton in a chair as though he were a guest at the meal. These unusual behaviors were meant as reminders to the diners that life is short, and that we should "eat, drink and be merry, because tomorrow we die" (1 Corinthians 15:32). People were trained to enjoy earthly pleasures as long as they could, and the dining table reminded them that life ends only in the grave. Dining is different for Christians. When Christians share the sacred meal of Holy Communion, we are not reminded that our lives are limited by the grave, but that our lives are unlimited in the Resurrection of Christ. St. Ignatios of Antioch called Holy Communion the "medicine of immortality." To receive Holy Communion is to participate in the Resurrection of our Lord, and to announce his message of new life. Let us prepare for Holy Communion by living lives worthy of what we have received, and let us leave Church each week empowered with the new life we have been given.

**Fr. George Parsenios** *is Professor of New Testament at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology.* ***www.hchc.edu***

***Diakonia*** *is made possible by a generous grant from* ***Leadership 100***

**Scan for today's service text**

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**FROM THE ORIGINAL GREEK:** Enkomia (ἐγκώμια)

# What are "Praises or Lamentations?"

**Fr. George Parsenios**

The central hymns of the Good Friday service are called in Greek *enkomia*. This term most likely comes from the Greek word *komos*, which means "party" or "festival." In Ancient Greece, an athletic champion would receive a party called a *komos*, and the songs that were sung to celebrate his victory were called *enkomia*. Some English translations of the *enkomia* of Good Friday follow this sense of the word and refer to the *enkomia* as "Praises." This translation is not entirely wrong. The Good Friday hymns indeed praise Christ for his victory over death, as *enkomia* should. But if this translation is not wholly wrong, neither is it completely correct. The term *enkomia* came to be used in Christian practice for the praises spoken over dead people in funeral eulogies. Funeral *enkomia* mingled the typical tone of praise with lamentation for the lost loved one. This sense of the word clearly lies behind the Good Friday "Lamentations." These *enkomia* praise Christ for his victorious Resurrection, even as they express our heartfelt lamentations as we consider the agony of our Lord who suffered on our behalf even to the point of death on a cross.

**THIS WEEK'S LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY**

# The New Smyrna Colony

The earliest Greek Orthodox worshiping community in North America formed in 1768, when seven British ships carrying Peloponnesian Greeks—including an Orthodox priest—landed in New Smyrna, East Florida, then Britain's fourteenth Crown colony. The settlers agreed to work as indentured servants in exchange for land after completing their contracts and were promised freedom to practice their faith. The colony built a church for them and provided the Greek Orthodox priest with housing and a $100 annual salary.

Although Greek crop production succeeded, the New Smyrna colony struggled. Harsh treatment, poverty, and poor living conditions led to unrest and rebellion. In 1777, the remaining colonists abandoned the settlement and marched to St. Augustine seeking relief. The building that sheltered the survivors now houses the first National Shrine of the Archdiocese, dedicated to St. Photios.

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**SATURDAY OF LAZARUS AND PALM SUNDAY**

# Full of Joy and Hope

Before Holy Week begins, we celebrate two special days: the raising of Lazarus and Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. These two joyous events happen right before Jesus' final days. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, many people believed in Him. His enemies became angry and planned to kill Him. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, the crowds spread palm branches before Him and welcomed Him like a king. The Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday – the two days between the Great Fast and Holy Week – are full of joy and hope. The events of these days anticipate Jesus' victory over death and the coming of His Kingdom into our world.

## Welcoming the King Into Your Life

**Eva Konstantakos**

Palm Sunday celebrates Christ's entry into Jerusalem as King—not a king of worldly power, but of peace and humility. Riding on a donkey, He fulfills the prophecy: "Behold, your king is coming to you; humble and mounted on a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9, RSV). The crowds welcomed Him with joy, shouting "Hosanna!" Yet days later, many turned away. This day asks: Will we welcome Christ into our lives and keep Him there?

Lent leads us to this moment of decision. Christ does not come to rule by force but to transform hearts. St. Andrew of Crete wrote, "Let us spread before His feet, not garments or lifeless branches, but ourselves, clothed in His grace." Welcoming Christ means more than waving palms—it means following Him beyond the celebration, even to the Cross.

Palm Sunday is a call to humility and courage. Will we remain faithful when the path becomes difficult? Will we choose love over pride, peace over power?

## Challenge:

Place a palm or green branch in your room, or somewhere that will be visible to you, as a reminder to welcome Christ daily—not just in words, but in actions of love and humility. Let every choice this week echo your "Hosanna."

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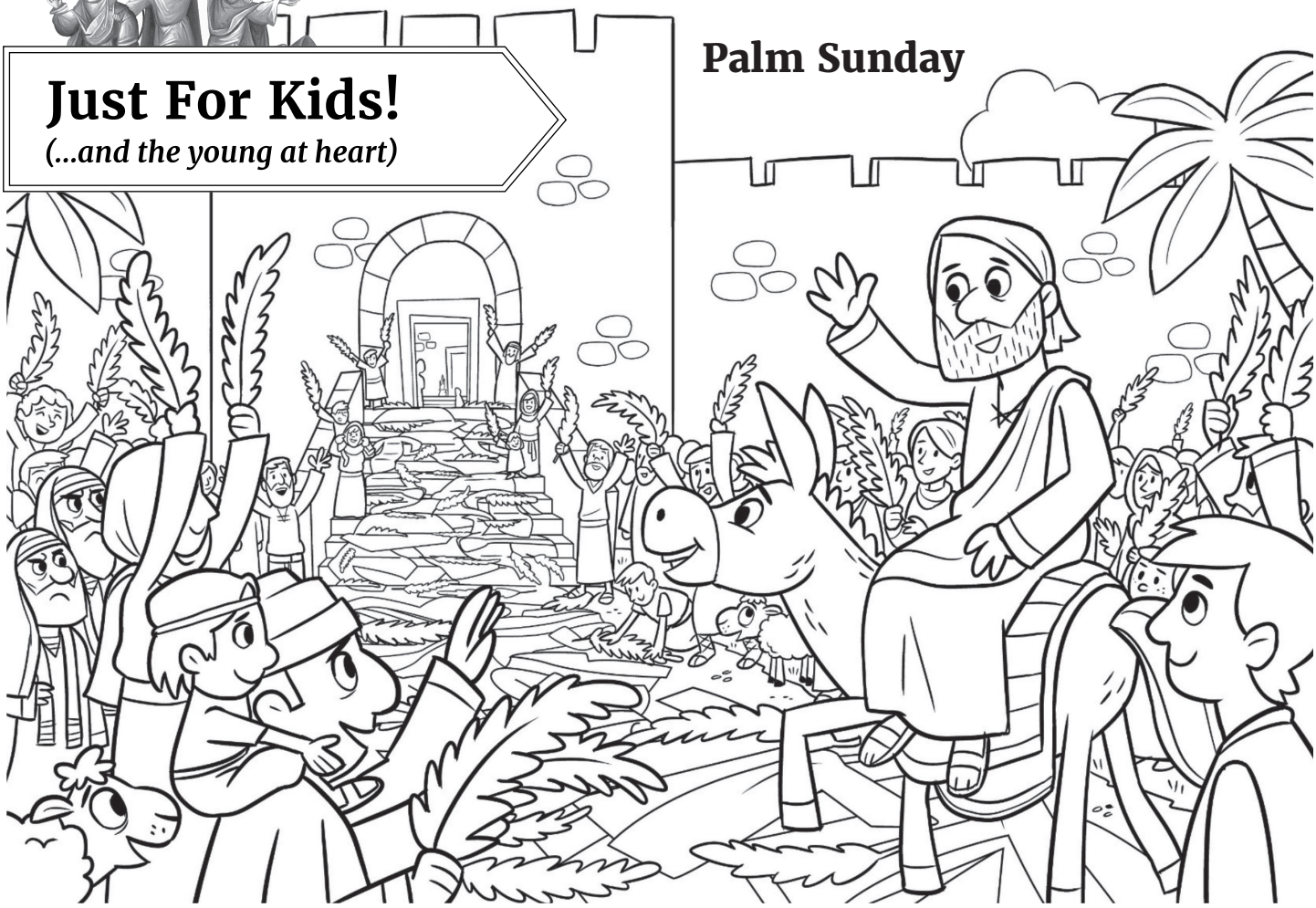
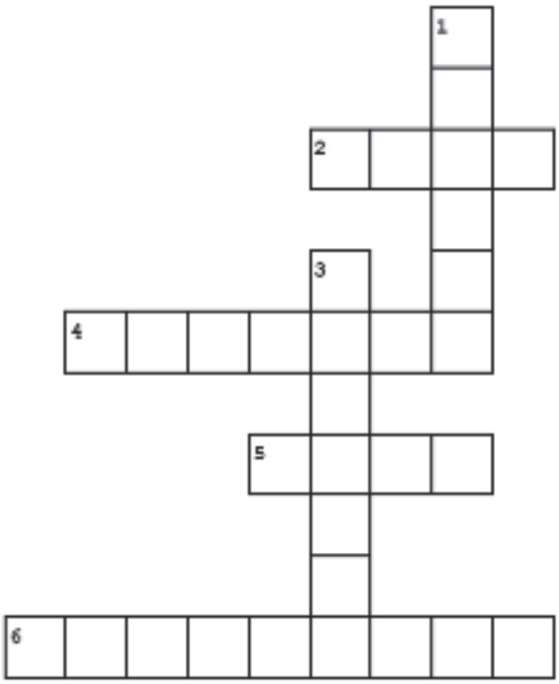
# Just For Kids!

*(...and the young at heart)*

## Palm Sunday






**ACROSS**

**2.** People treated Jesus like a _____

**4.** What do Palm branches symbolize

**5.** People spread branches from what kind of tree?

**6.** What city was Jesus entering on Palm Sunday?

**DOWN**

**1.** Jesus rode on a _____

**3.** What word did people call out on Palm Sunday?

*Key: 1. Donkey 2. King 3. Hosanna 4. Royalty 5. Palm 6. Jerusalem*

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