***4 24 16***

***THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK***

***“Brethren, rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice….The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything…”***

As we gather together on this blessed Sunday, we rejoice with branches of palms and cry Hosanna to our Lord, who **“*is at hand.”*** St. Paul’s Epistle for this glorious day speaks to us of the absolute joy of the Christian life. It is a joy that frees us from all anxiety- and from fear of any earthly thing-even death itself. This freedom from fear gives us a peace which passes all human understanding. How can we find this joy?

We must first understand what this joy is not. It is not “happiness” in the usual sense of the word. Most people today are seeking happiness in the success, comfort, and pleasures of this world; to be materially without need, and to be satisfied and content with one’s circumstances and even relationships. The problem with this is that when we base our contentment on external circumstances- those circumstances can, and often do, rapidly shift. Clearly, this kind of happiness can only be fleeting and, at best, superficial. Joy is something much different-deeper, permanent, and unshakeable.

Surprisingly, St. John Chrysostom starts out his commentary on this verse by quoting our Lord Jesus, **“Blessed are they that mourn”**! How should we understand this? When we mourn the loss of a loved one, we do so because we have had a chance to love them. It is only by loving others that we can truly find joy and blessedness. It is in our loving others that we draw close to God. And as we draw close to God we begin to trust Him. We trust Him, even when we cannot quite understand our external circumstances-whether we are happy or we suffer. We trust Him because He has promised us not a temporal happiness that is fleeting, but rather a joy which is eternal. We can be certain that our love for our departed ones will never end and that it, indeed, will grow stronger and more glorious both in this age and in the age to come. We miss them-for we have lost them temporally- but yet we rejoice as we commend them into the hands of our gracious Lord, looking confidently for our own and their eternal salvation.

Finally, beloved, we must understand that to mourn, at a deeper level, means to mourn for our own sins, and also, even the sins of others. First we must weep for our own sins, for in sinning we have turned our face away from our God. To sin, ultimately, is to seek to find happiness outside of God; on our own- in what we desire. And we must also understand that our God is love- true love. Therefore, when we sin, we transgress against love itself. If we recognize this deep tragedy that lies inside of us and of others, it will be impossible for us to judge others, nor to even judge ourselves. We will only be able to turn to God with tears and say ***“Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.”*** This cry is not only one of repentance and mourning, but of trust, of love, and, indeed, of joy. We can have complete confidence that our Lord will never reject such a prayer. From such a prayer comes forth a fervent desire to seek and build in our souls truth, justice, purity, and all of those virtues that St. Paul mentions in this Epistle. If we sincerely strive for these things in our love for Him, He will grant them all to us- and more. We will become thankful-both in good times and in bad. We will rejoice always, for He will fill us with His unending life, and thereby grant us a joy, both here and in the world to come. This is the joy that we Christians should seek every minute of our lives and with every ounce of our strength. It is a joy which can never nor will ever be taken away from us. Amen.