



The Feast of Friendship: On Lazarus Saturday



In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!

I wish to congratulate you all – Fathers, brothers, and sisters – on the completion of the Holy Forty Days and on the feast of the Rising of Lazarus and Palm Sunday!

Holy Week is a special week. As the Church teaches, Great Lent is a time when we go to God, and Holy Week is when God comes to us.

This week begins with the feast of the Rising of the Righteous Lazarus, about which we heard in today's Gospel reading. It is no accident that St. Innocent of Kherson calls this a feast of friendship, of special love. If we look attentively at the events that took place, we will see that it was then that the Lord, for the first time in His human history, shed tears. He wept before the tomb of the Righteous Lazarus. He did not weep on the Cross when He was crucified, but here He weeps. But this weeping is different from ours when we weep over the grave of the departed, when one of us attends a funeral and approaches the grave of a loved one – those are tears of separation, tears of prayer for him.

Although Christ knows that in a moment He will return His friend Lazarus to life, He weeps. These are tears of love, an indication of his sincere friendship for this man. And then the Lord raises him. He calls Lazarus His friend. Today's feast compels us to wonder: how should friends of God live, what must they undergo? Lazarus was God's friend. Who else does Christ call His friends in the Gospel? The Apostles. Do you recall the Mystical Supper? Christ said: *Ye are My friends* (John 15:14).

Imagine that we were to go onto the street now and ask people: "Please tell me, if someone were God's friend, how will he live in this world?" The majority of people would reply: "He should have everything good and beautiful in life!"



But the Lord puts in differently. He shows us in the persons of the Apostles that true friends of God undergo a hard school of trials and suffering. They are not untouchable in terms of evil in this world. Conversely, if we often see an ungodly person who is prospering, this demonstrates that the Lord has departed from him. Corpses do not need doctors, because it goes without saying that there is nothing doctors can do with them. In the same way, the Lord might withdraw from someone when He sees that treating him is pointless. These words are in Holy Scripture: *We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed* (Jeremiah 51:9 [28:9 LXX]). Even the Lord, the most powerful doctor, can be unable to cure, heal, and raise a person.

Earthly prosperity is not an indicator of nearness to God. This was the case in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament things differ. Last Sunday we heard how two disciples, who were close to the Lord, approached Christ and asked: “Let us sit in Your glory!” The Lord asked a question to test them: “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?” They replied: “We are!” He told them: “You will drink this cup” [cf. Mark 10:37-39]. And all the Apostles drank this cup. This is the cup of salvation about which the Psalmist David spoke long before Christ’s Nativity: *I will take the cup of salvation, and I will call upon the name of the Lord* (Psalm 115:4).

People frequently ask: “Why is life in Russia, our country, which is under the protection of the Mother of God and has so many holy things, so bad?” People often equate and identify nearness to God with simple



earthly happiness. I always give the following example. A soldier on the battlefield cannot ask his superiors: "Give me a couple of days off. I have things I want to do." There is a war going on in which people are not just shedding blood, but giving up their lives. Our earthly life is a war. But paradise, blessedness, and true happiness – that will be in the hereafter in large measure. But here we have a foretaste of this blessedness in union with God.

I am very pleased that today many people received the Holy Mysteries of Christ, half of the children. This means that mamas and papas truly love their children, that they want them to grow up to be wonderful people, Christians with a capital letter.

The feats of Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday are united by a single troparion, because these events followed one another. During Christ's beautiful and triumphant Entry into Jerusalem, the entire people cry out and sing: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" But God knows that while these people are singing Hosanna, evil is preparing the Cross, suffering, and death for Him. In a few days these same people will cry out: "Crucify Him!"

Why is the Lord going to Jerusalem? Why does He need momentary glory and triumph? The Church replies: in order to show the future resurrection and future glory of Christianity and the power of the Cross. Because a short time will pass after the suffering on the Cross, the Resurrection, and Pentecost, and then the Apostles will go to all the ends of the Roman Empire and fearlessly witness to the Risen Christ. This is what Christ shows by His triumphant Entry into Jerusalem. Not this Jerusalem, the place of His triumph, but Jerusalem as the Lord's Church, which will be supplemented by an enormous number of God's people. It is through the Church that these people will enter Christ's Kingdom, in its joy, light, and triumph.

Here we are standing on the threshold of the greatest of events: Holy Week and the Lord's Resurrection. One thing remains: to follow Christ. Where is He inviting us? Not to Paradise! He is first of all inviting us onto the Cross, then into His Tomb, and only after this to Heaven. May the Lord grant that we might find within ourselves the strength not to throw up our hands when we see that something does not work out in life and when evil triumphs over us.

During times of great warfare on the frontline, the enemy might temporarily win some piece of land. But this does not mean that he has won the whole war. The Lord defeats His enemies everywhere and always, first of all in our souls. If our souls do not unite with God, if in this life we do not feel the radiance and joy of Christ's Resurrection, then nothing external can change us. We can stand in magnificent churches, but how will that change things if we ourselves will not battle against our passions? Our main enemy is pride, for which the very first angel was cast down; we also see the manifestation of this pride in Adam. It is the desire to get what you want without working for it. This does not happen, as we know from both ecclesiastical and civil history. Therefore, let us constantly work on our inner man. The Lord is our helper, but He will not do anything for us, but He will help us. We need to learn this lesson and follow Him first to the Cross, then to the Grave, and finally to Heaven. Amen.

Delivered on April 16, 2011, in the Church of the Protection in Novodvinsk (Arkhangelsk Oblast).

Translated from the [Russian](#).



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