

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Prayer before sermon:*

Dear Lord! We thank You for this day and for Your word! We pray that You bless us when we are now considering it! May Your Spirit guides us and writes Your words in our hearts that we grow in faith and live according to Your words! Amen!

Dear friends!

I am very happy and blessed to have this opportunity to be here and to celebrate this Sunday Service with you. I bring a lot of greetings to you from Nurme's congregation and people from Lauciene. We are happy that Jesus is the one who has united us and blessed our friendship. And we pray that He would guide our cooperation and keep us all in faith, hope and love.

Jesus is the center of everything. I firmly believe in that. In Him we see God's love to each of us. Of course, different people with different beliefs and opinions may see in Jesus what they want to see or expect.

Lent season usually starts with a reading from Gospel of Matthew chapter 4, where we can read about Jesus' temptation. In those 3 temptations Devil tried to convince Jesus to do what the people wanted Jesus to be and do and not the will of His Heavenly Father. 3 temptations and people's expectations instead of His true mission.

Firstly, Israelites saw and hoped the Messiah to be the one who would solve their economical issues. They saw what Jesus did with the food and how He fed a lot of people with a few products.

For many people it is much easier to believe in Jesus and to follow Him if everything is fine and we enjoy God's blessings. It is easier to shout „Hosanna!” if the days are good. But we all know that God's love and plan is much higher than goodies and fortunes (dainty, something good) of this world.

Secondly, Israelites hoped that the Messiah would be a spiritual leader. A leader who will unite and inspire the nation to be as one. We see that people were disappointed in pharisees and priests, who kept themselves away from the people. Many people were following Jesus wherever He was going to listen His preaching.

And again Jesus is much more than that. Not just words which can inspire and lift our hearts and minds up, but which makes us all truly alive and changes us all from inside. Purifies us. He Himself is the living God's Word, which works.

And thirdly, Israelites expected the Messiah to be their political leader who would return the past glory of Israel like in David's and Solomon's time. They hoped that Messiah would unite nation not only spiritually, but also politically and will help to get rid of Roman occupants.

Nothing could stop us now, since we have somebody who can raise the dead. Yes, Jesus came to help us to get rid of occupation, but it is not Roman. It is sin, death, devil and hell.

When we put this whole together, we see why people were so excited when Jesus came to Jerusalem. They saw (what they thought) the fulfillment of ancient prophecies. They were right, but they didn't understand it correctly. People were so blinded by their expectations that they didn't even notice that Jesus was sitting on a donkey not a white horse as it should be with triumphant.

Jesus comes with humility. He is bringing peace and forgiveness. Jesus comes to complete the task why Father sent Him. The crowd didn't understand it. Later they were so disappointed that „Hosanna” changed to „Crucify him!”

Many things make sense only if we are ready to grow in Christ. Here we can look at Mary. Jesus was a close friend of Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary. Martha was the active one. Always ready to serve and to be a good housewife.

But Mary. Her place was always at the feet of Jesus: when she was listening in His words; when she fell by Jesus' feet when Lazarus was dead; when she poured expensive oil on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair.

We can follow and see her transformation and growing: from a listener she goes through hardship and difficult questions and she became a person who was ready to serve and to testify Jesus as her lord. No words, no questions.

In today's reading she shows more understanding and faith than the whole crowd. I believe that the Holy Spirit guided her heart and wanted to show to everyone, why Jesus is going to Jerusalem.

Holy Spirit's presence could be the sweet fragrance of the perfume which filled the house. And Mary's generosity using the whole oil leaving nothing symbolizes how Holy Spirit later is poured out in this world to everyone who believes in Jesus.

The word „Messiah” means „anointed or anointed one”. His mission was to die on the cross for our sins, so we could all be free of sin and start a new life in which we are ready to serve.

Jesus' cross helps us to be truly free and to see that there is much more than this life and world we see and understand. There is much more than our expectations and wishes which often hinder us to grow in God. Jesus is the king and His throne was on the cross.

Where are we in this situation? The crowd or Mary? What can we say about ourselves now, when we are a week before Easter? Are we always ready to grow in faith in Jesus?

What is Jesus to us? Do we put our expectations and plans above God's plans or we follow Jesus no matter how hard it sometimes is? Do we follow Him not just till Jerusalem but also through its streets to Golgotha passing by His cross and empty tomb?

May God bless us all today and also the next week when we will be thinking about Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. May His love and presence be as a sweet perfume which purifies us and strengthens us in faith, hope, love and willing to serve and follow Jesus.

Amen!