

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN – JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM

We have come to the last week of our Lord's Life. The Evangelists could not set down all the wonders of that Life, for St. John tells us every day was filled with marvels. But when they come to this last week they follow their Lord, as it were, with slower and more reverent step, giving a fuller and more minute account of His actions day by day.

There are many reasons for this. It is not only that in this week He accomplished the great work He came to do; redeemed us from sin and hell; reconciled us with His Father; opened the gates of Heaven to us, and set up the New Law, the New Sacraments, the New Priesthood in place of the Old; but it is because in this week the tenderness of His love comes out more wonderfully than ever. His words and acts and prayers are so brimming over with love and sweetness that the Evangelists could not bear to pass them over in silence. We owe these blessed writers more for their account of this week than for all beside. And we should come to the history of these last days of our dear Lord's Life on earth with hearts more reverent, more full of love and gratitude than hitherto, that we may believe and understand and feel about them as is pleasing to Him and helpful to our own souls.

The day after the supper in Simon's house was chosen by Christ for His solemn entry into the City in which such great things were to be done. Accompanied by the Twelve and by a crowd going up for the Feast, He left Bethany. When they had reached Bethphage, a village on the eastern slope of Olivet, He sent two of His disciples, saying to them:

"Go ye into the village that is over against you, and immediately you shall find an ass tied and a colt with her, on which no man hath ever sitten; loose them and bring them to Me. And if any man shall say anything to you, say ye that the Lord hath need of them, and forthwith he will let them go."

"Now all this was done," says St. Matthew, " that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet saying: "Tell ye the daughter of Sion: Behold, thy King cometh to thee meek, and sitting on an ass,, and a colt, the foal of her that is used to the yoke." Every prophecy concerning Him was clearly before the mind of our Blessed Saviour, and, at the proper time, He fulfilled each even to its smallest circumstances. This exact fulfilment of prophecy was one of the marks by which the Jews ought to have known Him to be the Messiah, but they would not notice what they did not want to see.

The disciples found the colt and its mother tied to the gate just as Jesus had said, and they began to loose them.

"What are you doing loosing the colt ? " cried out the owners. They answered as Jesus had told them, and the owners let the animals go. The disciples brought them to Jesus and laid their long cloaks upon the colt by way of trappings, and He sat upon it. The procession

formed about Him and began its march, the solemn entry of the Messiah-King into His capital, solemn and yet so humble, the King riding on a little creature not yet broken in, and followed, not by the royal guards, but by a joyous throng, men, women, and children, chiefly the poor, who crowded round Him and filled the air with their shouts of gladness. "A very great multitude" we are told, "spread their garments in the way, and others cut boughs from the trees and strewed them in the way."

When, following the steep footpath . up the Mount, they had reached the summit, they halted, for another multitude from Jerusalem was making its way up the western slope. News had spread through the City that Jesus of Nazareth, who had raised Lazarus to life, was on His way thither, and the people were pouring out to meet Him and take Him back in triumph. The two multitudes met and mingled at that point of the road from which the City first bursts full on the view. Jerusalem in all its majesty appeared beneath, and at the sight the whole concourse of His disciples, they that went before and they that followed, began with joy to praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying:

"Blessed be the King who cometh in the name of the Lord, peace in Heaven and glory on high! Hosanna to the Son of David ! Blessed be the Kingdom of our father David that cometh, Hosanna in the highest!"

There were some Pharisees in the vast procession, and at their old occupation of faultfinding. Having tried in vain to stop the shouts of joy, they made their way up to our Lord and said to Him:

"Master, rebuke Thy disciples." He said to them : "I say to you that if these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out." The disciples were beside themselves with delight.

"It has come at last!" they said to one another as they walked proudly by their Master's side. And right heartily did they wave their palms and join in the cry:

"Blessed he the Kingdom of our father David that cometh, Hosanna in the highest!"

There, on the summit of Olivet, stood the procession facing the City. Palaces, towers, battlements, gardens, lay bathed in the warm glow of the afternoon sun; and, towering above all, appeared the snowy marble and glittering gold of the gorgeous Temple, the pride and the joy of every child of Israel. The people were bringing her King, her long-expected Messiah, to Jerusalem, and at the sight of the City rising there in all her glory, their joyous shouts broke out afresh. And the King Himself—how did He look upon Jerusalem? St. Luke tells us:

"And when He drew near the City He wept over it, saying: "If thou also hadst known and that in this thy day the things that are to thy peace! but now they are hidden from thy eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, and thy enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and straiten thee on every side, and beat thee flat to the ground and

thy children who are in thee; and they shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone, because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation."

He knew what was coming—that in five days He would be hanging in agony on a cross outside the walls, forsaken by all. But it was not this that brought the tears to His eyes. It was the misery of the guilty City that was about to reject Him and pray that His Blood might be upon her and upon her children. He looked forward forty years and thought of the horrors of that awful siege when, at just such a Pasch as this, the Roman army would close round the walls and the starving millions within; when the Temple would be burnt to the ground; when there would not be wood enough for the numbers to be crucified, nor purchasers for the thousands sold into slavery. He knew what was coming upon poor Jerusalem, and His tears were for her. Amid cries of joy and waving of branches, the children running on before shouting

"Hosanna, blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord!" He entered Jerusalem. And the whole City was moved. Men, women and children swarmed on to the roofs and out into the streets to ask:

"Who is this?" Those who were bringing in our Lord answered triumphantly:

"This is Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth." Under their breath the Pharisees muttered to one another: "Do you see that we prevail nothing? behold the whole world has gone after Him."

The crowds dispersed, our Lord dismounted, and followed by the Twelve entered the Temple. Let us see Him going in at the Beautiful Gate. His form is slender and delicate. His hair falls over His shoulders beneath the handkerchief that binds His brow and covers the back of His neck. Over the tunic, a long robe girt in at the waist, is a wide cloak, or abba, blue bordered and tasselled at the corners. It falls over one shoulder, reaching nearly to the bottom of the tunic. The sandals, much worn, are merely soles strapped to the feet. Everything is simple, poor, travel-stained. Yet He is truly kingly as He moves forward among the throng. In His look, His bearing, His gestures, there is a marvellous mingling of majesty and humility. The charm of His Person, the graciousness of His ways, captivates the people and attracts even the little children, who crowd about Him. Yet those who love Him most worship Him with deepest awe. Never have men felt as they feel in the Presence of this Man. And no wonder, for He is not only truly Man—He is God! Still singing "Hosanna!" which means "Save now!" the children followed Him into the Temple.

They called upon the Levite children of the Temple choir to join them, and presently there rose up from the marble Court into the blue sky overhead the exquisite voices of the little choristers, welcoming our Blessed Lord in the Hallel, or hymn of praise they had ready for the Messiah's coming. The priests and the rulers disowned Him, but the children received Him with songs of gladness. Sweeter far and more pleasing to God than all the solemn chants of the Temple's magnificent worship, was that afternoon's Benediction service of the

little children. He needed their comfort, for His Heart was saddened by the same sights and sounds that had dishonoured His Father's House three years before. Up from the Court of the Gentiles came the cries of traders, the bleating of sheep, the wrangling of the money-changers—all the noise of a market, and a greater uproar than usual, for on this day the Paschal lamb was chosen, to be kept apart till the hour of sacrifice. Our Lord said nothing. He had come to the Temple to offer Himself as the Lamb chosen from all eternity for sacrifice, and He would spend these last peaceful hours in the Temple Courts quietly with the children.

The blind and the lame came to Him and He healed them as the children stood around. Then, as evening fell, He went out to Bethany with the Twelve. The short triumph was over. 'Not one out of those multitudes who had hailed Him as Messiah in the morning had offered Him a shelter for the night. He climbed the path down which the procession had passed a few hours before, and came to the house at Bethany and was welcomed there.

Early next morning, Monday, on His way to Jerusalem, He saw a fig-tree in the distance. He went up to it, for He was hungry. And finding nothing on it but leaves, He said to it:

"May no fruit grow on thee any more for ever." Coming into the Temple, He found in the Court of the Gentiles the same disgraceful scene as before—oxen, sheep and lambs huddled together by thousands, or being dragged hither and thither, traders shouting to one another, pilgrims from distant countries disputing in many languages with the money-changers.

Suddenly, above the confusion and the din, was heard a loud, clear Voice:

"My House shall be called the House of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves." Every head was turned to the Speaker. He stood upon a step looking down upon the scene. There was no scourge in His hand now; the Divine majesty that shone in His human face—this did the work of cleansing. The birdsellers caught up their cages as best they might; the money-changers, the traders of every kind, fled before Him, content to drop and lose their wares rather than meet the indignation of that glance. Not a word had the priests to say in self-defence. It was they who allowed this unholy trading, it was to them the profits went. They were stung to the quick by being thus disgraced, and consulted together how they might destroy Jesus. If only He in His turn could be put to shame before the people, their credit might be restored. And at last they hit on a plan for bringing this about.

Everyone knew that the scribes, whose task it was to interpret the Law, were only ordained after long study, and empowered to teach by the delivery of a tablet and a key. Now, where had this carpenter of Nazareth studied? Let Him answer that and show His tablet and key before the people. If He should avoid this trap, they had another ready from which it would be impossible to escape. Some of the Herodians should go up to Him when He was teaching and pretend to have a difficulty of conscience about the tribute which every Jew had to pay

to Caesar. Was it lawful to pay it or not? If He said it was not lawful, they would at once give Him over to Pontius Pilate and to the vengeance of Rome. If He should say it was lawful, the people would turn upon Him as a traitor to His country. Now, then, they had Him safe. They were so delighted with their scheme that they were impatient for His hour of teaching on the morrow.

As our Lord with the Twelve came over Olivet on Tuesday morning they passed the fig-tree, or rather the place where it had stood, for it was withered away to the very roots. "And the disciples seeing it wondered," says St. Matthew. Our Lord entered the Temple and made His way through the crowd already waiting for Him to the Court of the Women, the common meeting place of worshippers. He was walking in one of the Porches there when a number of chief priests, scribes and ancients were seen advancing. They were Sanhedrists, and the people respectfully made way before them. Coming up to Jesus, they addressed Him in a lofty tone:

"Tell us by what authority Thou dost these things, and who hath given Thee this authority." Jesus answering said to them:

"I also will ask you one word, which, if you shall tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things.

"Was John the Baptist a prophet sent from God or not?" They were silent and thought within themselves: If we say he was a prophet from God He will ask: Why, then, did you not believe in Him? If we say he was no prophet we are afraid of the people. And they said: "We know not." He said to them: "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things."

He went on to tell them a parable of a householder who sent servant after servant to the husbandmen in charge of his vineyard to receive the fruits from them. And the husbandmen beat, and wounded, and killed them. Having yet one son most dear to him, He also sent him unto them last of all, saying: "I will send my beloved son; it may be when they see him they will reverence him." And the husbandmen said: "This is the heir, let us kill him and we shall have his inheritance." And, taking him, they cast him forth out of the vineyard and killed him.

After this our Lord told the parable of a king who made a marriage for his son, and those who were invited would not come. So the king gave their places to others. His enemies knew that in these parables He spoke of them, and they were filled with rage; but the people were there and they could do nothing. A party of the Herodians now came up, and one of them, bowing low before Him, said:

"Master, we know that Thou art a true speaker and teachest the way of God in truth. Tell us, therefore, is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?" But Jesus, knowing their wickedness, said: "Why do ye tempt Me, ye hypocrites? Show Me the coin of the tribute." And they offered Him a penny. Jesus said to them:

"Whose image and superscription is this?" They say to Him: "Caesar's." He said to them: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." What could they say? By their own law he was the owner of a country whose image and inscription were found on its coins. They were so filled with wonder at His answer, that they could neither reply nor hide their confusion. The best thing to do was to get away as fast as possible. And this they did. Thus did His enemies come up one after another, to have their plots overthrown as easily as a child's house of cards. The people watched Him with admiration. They saw Him interrupted continually in His teaching by His malignant foes, yet bearing Himself with a royal dignity and calmness that neither insult nor cowardly cunning could disturb.

Will the people keep faithful to Him when the hour of trial comes? We shall see. Our Lord had borne long and patiently with the Pharisees. But, seeing that they were hardening their hearts more and more and doing grievous harm to others, He at length pronounced against them those terrible condemnations which make us tremble as we hear them. Again and again came the fearful words:

"Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" He rebuked their pride, their avarice, their cunning. He would still send His servants to teach them and warn them of the judgments that were at hand, but they would persecute and scourge and crucify them.

"Jerusalem! Jerusalem!" He cried, "thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent to thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children as the hen gathers her chickens under her wings and thou wouldst not. Behold, your house shall be left to you desolate. For I say to you you shall not see Me henceforth till you say:

"Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." Leaving the rulers, He went and sat down near the Treasury and watched the people dropping their offerings into the trumpet-shaped chests that stood there. Many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she cast in two mites, which make a farthing. And, calling His disciples together, He said to them:

"Amen, I say to you this poor widow hath cast in more than all. For all they did cast in of their abundance, but she of her want hath cast in all she had, even her whole living."

He took His final leave of the Temple that Tuesday. The disciples, struck by His sadness, followed Him in silence down into the valley and across the brook Cedron and up the slope of Olivet. But He could not leave the city without another farewell glance. He loved Jerusalem, and His heart was breaking at the thought of what it was, what it might have been, what in a few years it was to come to.

Arrived at the summit of the Mount, He turned and faced the City. So beautiful it looked in the quiet glow of evening, its massive walls, palaces, terraces, the snowy colonnades and

golden roofing of the Temple, all lit up by the setting sun, that one of the disciples said to Him:

"Master, behold what manner of stones and what buildings are here." And Jesus answering said to him:

"Seest thou all these great buildings? There shall not be left a stone upon a stone that shall not be thrown down." He seated Himself on a ledge of rock facing the Temple, and seemed lost in thought. Peter, Andrew, James, and John came and asked Him apart:

"Tell us when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the world?"

Then He told them what would happen before the destruction of Jerusalem and before the Last Day. The way to Heaven for His followers would be through troubles of every kind.

"But he that shall persevere to the end," said Jesus, "he shall be saved." As the awful Day of Judgment draws near, there will be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars, earthquakes and pestilence and famine, and roaring of the sea and of the waves, men withering away for fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world.

And yet, in spite of these signs and terrors, the Great Day will come suddenly at last and find men in the midst of their enjoyments and sins. Like a flash of lightning, seen by all, startling all—so will He come. His servants must be always ready, not so much for the Last Day of the world as for the day of their death, which will be the Last Day for each one of us. He told them the parable of the Ten Virgins who had to meet the Bridegroom with lighted lamps. And five were foolish and took no oil with them. And when at midnight came the sudden cry:

"Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet Him !" they were not ready and were shut out.

"Watch ye, therefore" He said, "for you know not when the lord of the house cometh. And what I say to you I say to all: "Watch!" He went on to tell them what will happen at the end of the world when He comes to judge all men:

"They shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven with much power and majesty. And He shall send His Angels with a trumpet and a great voice; and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest parts of the heavens to the utmost bounds of them. And all nations shall be gathered together before Him, and He shall separate them one from another as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats, and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left. Then shall the King say to them that shall be on His right hand:

"Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Then He shall say to them also that shall be on His left hand:

"Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just into life everlasting."