

**Palm Sunday**

**April 17, 2011**

**Joint Service for the Arabic and English-speaking Congregations**

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### **His City and Our City**

“And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it”

“Ye shall be witnesses unto me ... in Jerusalem.” (Acts 1:8)

The theme I want to offer you on this Palm Sunday is “His city and our city.”

From Bethany above the city of Jerusalem, Jesus looked out upon a scene which even today is one of the most interesting in the world.

From the highest point on the Mount of Olives, Jesus could see the city walls extending much farther to north and south than we see today. He could see the temple with its white marble and limestone walls shining the sun. He could see the tower of the Roman fortress just to the north of the temple and all the soldiers on guard. Palaces and public buildings could be seen clearly. He could also see the roofs of the simple houses of the people of Jerusalem.

This was his city, as well as our beloved city (Al Quds). It was the city of his people. Its name, Jerusalem, suggests that it was founded in peace. Everyone has a city that is part of his identity and presence. Jerusalem is that city for us, the Christian indigenous community. Jerusalem, for

us, is much more than a famous city which people want to visit. Jerusalem is our presence, witness and identity.

Jesus wept over his city. Luke gives us in a few words the prophetic vision of Jesus, the fulfillment of which was described by Josephus in detail which brings tears to our eyes. Josephus, a Jewish historian, wrote a book which tells of the destruction of Jerusalem when the Romans defeated the Jewish zealots in the year 70 AD. According to Josephus, the streets of Jerusalem ran with the blood of thousands of innocent victims. Many people have wept over Jerusalem.

The death of Jesus on the cross and the deaths of the two criminals who were with him were deaths in a long history of cruelty and death in his city, which is also our city.

The tragedy of the city of peace is that it has never enjoyed peace. Our Lord wept over Jerusalem because he saw the absence of the Love of God in the lives of its people. I am afraid since Jesus' time until now this continues to be what we see and experience.

For this reason Jesus wept as he wept for all others who suffered then and even now from the tragedy of humiliation and injustice.

Jerusalem is a city of identity, but let us not only identify with tragedy. Jerusalem is also the mother city of our faith.

Jesus tells his disciples almost seven weeks after his day of Triumph -- Ye shall be my witnesses ... in Jerusalem.

Jesus once again stood on the Mount of Olives with his disciples. This time he did not weep over the city. This time he had another purpose in mind. It was the time for his departure. Among his last words were these: "Ye shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem to the uttermost part of the earth." Yes, but also in Jerusalem. Did he still have hope for

Jerusalem? If not for the city, for the men, the women and the children of Jerusalem?

In our dear city, the words of Jesus come down to us. "Ye shall be my witnesses."

We, the disciples and the followers of Jesus, are called to follow out that which he had begun and continued, the preaching of the Gospel to the poor and the healing of the broken hearted as well as to work for a just peace.

We are to be witnesses to Jesus as victor over death and despair. These words of Jesus were spoken only a few weeks after the resurrection when that victory over sin and death were celebrated on the first Easter morning.

By the victory of Christ, we were given our true dignity and identity as sons and daughters of God. No longer do we weep over Jerusalem as people without hope. We are here in this city which gives us our identity as people of faith.

This is the message of the Church. This is the witness that Christians should give in Jerusalem because this is the City of the Resurrection. This is the good news for all of us.

We are to witness to Jesus as Savior. He is the Savior of all people, without distinction of class or race. Christ is for all. He does not reveal God as the God of one race or nation but as the God and Father of all. Jerusalem must be that place where all of God's children are welcome.

We serve this vision of the City of God and redeem this city by our attitudes, perseverance, commitment and strong fellowship in the Name of Christ, not to exclude anyone but to welcome everyone.

We pray for the day when there are no more tears shed over this city.

We pray for the day when all people are welcome in the City of God.

We ask our Lord for the strength to build this city of Jerusalem on the sure foundation of love, peace and justice, not for just a few, but for all.