

## The Meaning of the Opening of the Portals celebrated on Palm Sunday

Every Palm Sunday, at the end of Badarak the ceremony called "opening of the portal" is performed. After communion, when the curtain is closed, it remains closed. The celebrant priest along with a deacon kneels down in front of the closed curtain and starts the ceremony.

This ceremony tells us about the general mood of the supplicants, or the congregation on whose behalf the priest, the deacon and the choir are acting.

There is a distinct desire in this ceremony to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven.

We celebrate on Palm Sunday, the coming of the Lord to Jerusalem. Our church Fathers used this picture of the coming of the Lord and wanted to remind us about the second coming of the Lord which is vastly amplified in the Gospels. As you know it is the desire of each Christian believer to be received by Jesus at his second coming. So basically it is this desire that is being presented ceremonially through somewhat a spiritual play, comprised of three acts.

The actors of this play are:

1. The choir, which represents the congregation, sings a related hymn and paints a general picture or the mood of the day. At the beginning of each act they amplify the wish of the Congregation to be admitted into the "Heavenly Wedding Banquet" like the five Wise virgins and be with the Lord forever.
2. The priest, as ordained shepherd of his flock, implores personally to the heavens or the altar which is symbolically closed, to grant to his flock the right of the entrance.
3. Another priest or a deacon, who acts from behind the closed curtain, responds on behalf of the heavens to the supplications of the parish priest.

So each act is comprised of a hymn sung by the choir, a chanting and knocking of the door by the parish priest, and a dialogue between the parish priest and the second priest (or deacon) who acts from behind the closed curtain.

The play ends on a positive note when the curtain is opened ceremonially and the priest who was kneeling in front of the curtain enters into the Altar area, meaning the gate of heavens is opened and the entire church with their spiritual lamps lit, enter into the presence of the Lord.

Traditionally the curtain is opened officially by a 5 to 12 years old Gunkahayr or sponsor, who opens the curtain on behalf of the congregation. This practice may be a reminder to the congregation that unless they are involved heaven's gate will remain closed. Being in the presence of God needs devotion, and spiritual intense practice. As the priest from inside claims clearly, "This is the gate of the Lord through which only the righteous enter."

