

Daily Observances of Holy Week

"In Remembrance of a Pledge of Resurrection"

Saturday Morning of St. Lazarus

(Saturday before Palm Sunday; the service consists of Matins [Morning Prayers] and the Divine Liturgy.)

On this day the rising from the dead of St. Lazarus, the righteous friend of Christ, is celebrated. Holy Week begins with the phrase: "*Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany*", John 12:1. His arrival coincided with the Jewish Passover. It started on the 15th of the month of Nissan in commemoration of the freeing of the Hebrew people under the leadership of Moses, from the slavery of the Egyptians by the miraculous act of God. The Church relates preparation and redemption to the events of this week.

Six days before the Passover a feast was given for Christ in Bethany of Judea where Christ had stopped on His way to Jerusalem. Lazarus, His friend, and his sisters were present. A short time earlier Christ had risen Lazarus from the dead, thereby gaining the respect and faith of the people, but also the hatred of the fanatics. The Church names this day the "Saturday of Lazarus" in remembrance of the resurrection of Lazarus and its promise of universal resurrection for all men. The Church connects this celebration, by anticipation, with the Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem: "We carry the Symbols of victory and cry Hosanna in the highest".

The readings are Hebrews 12:28-13:8 and John 11:1-45.

"Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord....."

Palm Sunday Morning

(Palm Sunday services is held in the morning and consists of Matins [Morning Prayers] and the Divine Liturgy.)

Palm Sunday celebrates the glorious and brilliant feast of the Entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem. Zechariah had prophesied the entrance of the Messiah into Jerusalem, saying: "*Rejoice greatly ... O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, the King comes unto Thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass*", Zech. 9:9. The contemporary Jews associated this prophecy with the expected Messiah. This action of Christ testifies to His nature as Savior, but with the definite declaration that His Kingdom: was not of this world. The news that Christ was in Bethany provoked a general enthusiasm of acceptance, but also of indignation among the High Priests, who had decided to kill Christ. The main road leading to Jerusalem was covered with palm trees. The multitudes, with palm branches in their hands, spread their cloaks on the road as a show of respect, crying out-. "*Hosanna to the Son of David,- blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord*". All the actions and words of the people and,of

Christ had a Messianic meaning readily recognized by the Jews of that time. As usual, Christ went immediately to the Temple, where He prayed and taught. That evening He departed for Bethany.

A custom of distributing branches of palms to the people in the Church prevails to this day, commemorating the victory of Christ against the evil powers.

The Epistle reading is Phil. 4:4-9, and the Gospel reading is John 12:1-18.

"Behold the Bridegroom cometh in the midst of the night...."

(The service is MATINS (3)[Morning Prayers] of Great Monday aid is sung by anticipation on Palm Sunday evening.)

Monday of Holy Week (sung by anticipation now on Palm Sunday Evening) commemorates the blessed and noble Joseph and the fig tree which was cursed and withered by the Lord. The withering of the fig tree was a miracle of special symbolism, since the tree had leaves, but no fruit. It is symbolic of the many people who claim ethical and religious identity, but who in reality have empty lives that yield no fruit. This was also the case with some of the Pharisees of that period. Jesus cursed the tree: *"May no fruit ever come from you again!"* Matt. 21:19. The reference to the story of the virtuous Joseph of the Old Testament (Genesis 37-41) is made only for contrast, since the life of Joseph was a model of propriety and sincere observance of ethical principles.

On this evening we begin with the Hymn of the Bridegroom, "Behold the Bridegroom comes in the midst of the night... beware, therefore, O my soul, lest thou be borne down in sleep..... and lest thou be shut out from the Kingdom . . ." The canticle hymn also has a symbolic exhortation: "I see thy bridal hall adorned, O my Savior, and I have no wedding garment. . . O giver of Light, make radiant the vesture of my soul and save me". At this time the solemn procession of the Icon of Christ-Bridegroom takes place around the church. The people, anticipating the sufferings of Christ, sing: "Thy sublime sufferings, on this day, shine upon the world as a light of salvation".

The Gospel reading during this service is Matthew 21:18-43. It mentions that *"the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said. 'By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?'"* v. 23. They sought to have Christ accuse Himself in answering this question.

"Both watch and pray....."

Great Holy and Monday Morning

(The service is Matins of Tuesday morning sung by anticipation Monday evening.)

Tuesday of Holy Week (sung by anticipation now Monday evening) commemorates the parable of the Ten Virgins, Mtt. 25:1-13. Ethical preparation and wakefulness are the foundations of vivid faith. The parable of the Ten Virgins is developed around the theme of the Bridegroom: "Why are Thou heedless, O my soul? . . . Work most diligently with the talent which has been confided to thee; both watch and pray". The hymnologist reminds us, "I do not possess a torch aflame with virtue, and the foolish virgin I imitate when it is the time for action"; and, "Into the splendor of thy saints, how can I, who am unholy, enter?" The exhortation is given: "Come Ye faithful, let us work earnestly for the Master . . . increase our talent of grace ... Wisdom through good works".

The Gospel is Matthew 22:15-23 through 23:39; 24:26 through 26:2.

"When he came to himself.....he came to his father....."

Great Holy Tuesday Evening

(The service is Matins of Wednesday morning sung by anticipation on Tuesday evening.)

On Wednesday of Holy Week (sung by anticipation now on Tuesday evening) it has been ordained by the Holy Fathers of the Church that commemoration should be made of the anointing of Christ with myrrh by the woman in the house of Simon, the leper, in Bethany. Repentance was the mission of the prophets. It would be an apt one-word title for the Bible, because "*repentance*" was the mission of our Lord. This woman who demonstrated her repentance and her warm faith toward our Lord still presents to us the aroma of her virtue for imitation today.

On this evening is sung the beautiful "Hymn of Cassiane", probably a work of Patriarch Photius. It begins: "The woman who had fallen into many sins recognized thy Godhead, O Lord; Woe to me, saith she; receive the sources of my tears, O Thou who doth gather into clouds the water of the sea. Who can trace out the multitude of my sins and the abysses of my misdeeds? "O Thou whose mercy is unbounded".

The Gospel reading is John 12:17-50.

"The light of Christ shineth for all....."

Great Holy and Wednesday Morning

(The Divine Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts)

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is celebrated on this day for the last time during Lent. This very ancient Liturgy is a Vesper Service, with the Holy Gifts presanctified in the Liturgy on the previous Sunday. This Liturgy is offered every Wednesday and Friday during Lent so that the people may receive Holy Communion. This Liturgy is solemn, and reflects the grandeur and simplicity of the early Church. During Lent no other Liturgy is held except on Saturday, Sunday and March 25, when the Liturgies of St. Basil (on Sundays) and St. Chrysostom are officiated.

"Anointing him sick with oil in the name of the Lord....."

Great Holy Wednesday Evening

(The Mystirion of Unction)

The sacred ceremony of the Mysterion of the Holy Unction takes place on this Wednesday evening, following an old custom. It is the evening of repentance, confession and the remission of sins by the Lord, preparing the faithful to receive Holy Communion, usually the next day, Holy Thursday morning. Holy Unction is the Mysterion for cleansing sins and renewing the body and the spirit of the faithful. Holy Unction is one of the seven Sacraments of the Church, and it has its origin in the practice of the early Church as recorded in the Epistle of James (5:14-15). At the end of the service, the priest anoints the people with Holy Oil, the visible carrier of the Grace of God.

"Let no fear separate you from Me....."

Great Holy Wednesday Evening

(The service is Matins of Thursday morning sung by anticipation Wednesday evening.)

The Orthros of Thursday morning is sung by anticipation Wednesday evening. In many Orthodox churches, however, this service is sung at its designated Thursday morning time, before the Vespers and Divine Liturgy. "On Thursday in Holy Week (now Wednesday evening or Thursday morning) the Holy Fathers, who had well-ordained things, handed down to us successively from the Holy Apostles and the Sacred Gospels to celebrate four Events: the washing of the disciples' feet, the institution of the Holy Eucharist, the Marvelous Prayer, the betrayal".

The Gospel reading is St. Luke 22:1-39.

"Do this in remembrance of Me....."

Great Holy Thursday Morning

(The service is the Vespers and Divine Liturgy of Thursday evening which is sung in the morning by anticipation.)

Jesus drew His last breath of freedom on this Thursday night. Christ knew all the incidents which were about to take place, and called to Him His Apostles in order to institute the Holy Eucharist for them and for the Church forever. At the end of March, with the full moon as a brilliant lantern in the sky and the weather, mild, the people, in Jerusalem enjoyed the beginning of spring. In this, atmosphere, Christ presented Bread and Wine as the Elements of His Very Body and His Very Blood; they are the Precious Gifts which have been left as His perpetual Presence in the Church. The institution of the Holy Eucharist and its re-enactment through the centuries, both as a sacrifice and sacred ceremony (Mysterion), is the life giving remembrance which, along with the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ, constitutes the basis of salvation for the Christian.

Then followed the incidents of dramatic closing moments of Christ's life. After the washing of His Apostles' feet, He pointed out the betrayer, inaugurated the Eucharist, and pronounced the new commandment of love for one another. He spoke to them words of comfort, promising the descent of the Holy Spirit to complete man's union with Christ. His departure, Christ said, would bring to them and the world joy. Christ took His Apostles out in the mild night where He could see face-to-face His co-workers in the bright light of the full moon. In this spiritual mood and physical setting, Jesus withdrew to pray. After this agony of the "*bloody sweat*" came the kiss of Judas and His arrest. He thus became the source of spiritual and physical freedom for mankind.

The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil is officiated on this day. The readings are: 2 Cor. 11:23-32; Mtt 26:2-28; Jn. 13:3-17; Mtt 26:21-39; Lk. 22:43-44; Mtt 26:40-75; Mtt 27:1-2. During this Liturgy the priest prepares the "Amnos", the Holy Communion, which is kept throughout the whole year to be given the faithful in times of sickness. The Body and Blood of Christ is present in the Church during the entire year and throughout the ages. On this day, with greater feeling than ever, Christians come for Holy Communion singing: "Receive me Today, O Son of God, as a partaker of Thy Mystic Feast; for I will not speak of the Mystery to Thine enemies, I will not kiss Thee as did Judas, but as the thief I will confess Thee. Lord, remember me when I comest to Thy Kingdom."

"We worship Thy passion, O Christ....."

Great Holy Thursday Evening

(The service of the HOLY PASSION of our Lord Jesus Christ. The service is Matins of Friday morning sung by anticipation Thursday evening.)

Good Friday celebrates the holy, saving and awesome Passion of Christ. To take away our sins, Christ willingly endured the spittings, scourgings, buffetings, scorn, mocking and the purple robe; the reed, sponge, vinegar, nails, spear and, above all, the Cross and Death. The confession from the cross of the penitent thief, crucified with Christ, is celebrated. This service is long, but its content is dramatic and deeply moving for the devout Christian. Participation in the prayers and the historical sequence of the events, as related in the Gospels and hymns, provides a vivid foundation for the great events yet to come. Following are the references of the "Twelve Gospel" readings of this service:

1. St. John 13:31 thru Ch. 18,1
2. St. John 18:1-29
3. St. Matthew 26:57-75
4. St. John 18:28 thru Ch. 19:16
5. St. Matthew 27:3-32
6. St. Mark 15:16-32
7. St. Matthew 27:33-54
8. St. Luke 23:32-49
9. St. John 19:38-42
10. St. Mark 15:43-47
11. St. John 19:38-42
12. St. Matthew 27:62-66

These readings relate the last instructions of Christ to His disciples, the prophecy of the drama of the Cross, the dramatic prayer of Christ and His new commandment. The day should be devoted to reading the "Gospel of the Testament" of Christ which He left for all men. The Church services during Holy Week re-enact the events of this Gospel.

After the reading of the fifth Gospel comes the procession with the Crucifix around the church, while the priest chants the 15th antiphon: "Today is hung upon the Tree, He Who did hang the land in the midst of the waters. A Crown of thorns crowns Him Who is King of Angels. He is wrapped about with the purple of mockery Who wrapped the Heavens with clouds. He received buffetings Who freed Adam in Jordan. He was transfixed with nails Who is the Bridegroom of the Church. He was pierced with a spear Who is the Son of the Virgin. We worship Thy Passion, O Christ. Show also unto us thy glorious Resurrection".

During the Procession, the faithful Christian kneels and prays for his spiritual welfare, imitating the thief on the Cross who confessed his faith and devotion to Christ. He then approaches and reverently kisses the Crucifix.

"They cast lots upon my besture....."

Good Friday Morning

According to the Hebrew custom, the "Royal Hours", four in number, are read at this time. These services consist of hymns, psalms, and readings from the Old and New Testaments, all related prophetically and ethically to the Person of Christ. In some churches the "Hours" are read in the afternoon, before the Vesper services.

"Father forgive them for they know not what they do....."

Good Friday Morning

(The service is Vespers sung on Friday afternoon)

The Vespers of Friday afternoon are a continuation of the Royal Hours. During this service, the removal of the Body of Christ from the Cross is commemorated with a sense of mourning for the terrible events which took place. Once more, excerpts from the Old Testament are read together with hymns, and again the entire story is related, followed by the removal from the Cross and the wrapping of the Body of Christ with a white sheet as did Joseph of Arimathea. Apostle Paul, interpreting the dreadful event, exhorts the Church: *"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God . . . we preach Christ crucified . . . the power of God and the wisdom of God"*, 1 Cor. 1: 18f.

As the priest reads the Gospel, *and taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in a white cloth"*, he removes the Body of Christ from the Cross, wraps It in a white cloth and takes It to the altar. The priest then chants a mourning hymn: "When Joseph of Arimathea took Thee, the life of all, down from the Tree dead, he buried Thee with myrrh and fine linen . . . rejoicing. Glory to Thy humiliation, O Master, who clothest Thyself with light as it were with a garment". The priest then carries the cloth on which the Body of Christ is painted or embroidered around the church before placing It inside the Sepulcher, a carved bier which symbolizes the Tomb of Christ. We are reminded that during Christ's entombment He descends into Hades to free the dead of the ages before His Incarnation.

The Gospel readings which relate these events are: Matt. 27:1-38; Lk. 23:29-43; Matt. 27:29-54; Jn. 19:31-37; Matt. 27:55-61. Good Friday is the only day in the year on which the Divine Liturgy is not officiated.

Today the devoted Christian ponders in his heart the deep meaning of the

Seven Last Words of Christ uttered on the Cross, the first Divine Pulpit of Christianity.

"Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves"

Good Friday Evening - The Lamentation

(The service is Matins of Saturday morning sung by anticipation Friday evening.)

It consists of psalms, hymns and readings, dealing with the death of Christ, in contrast to His divinity, and in expectation of His Resurrection. One of the hymns relates: "He who holds all things is raised up on the Cross and all creation laments to see Him hang naked on the Tree". The thoughtful, and well-written *Odes*, sung by the choir, compare the Compassion of God and the cruelty of man; the Might of God and the moral weakness of man. The *Odes* picture all Creation trembling when witnessing its Creator hung by His own creatures: "Creation was moved . . . with intense astonishment when it beheld Thee hung in Golgotha". The *Odes* remind us of the vision of Isaiah, who saw Christ, "the unwaning light of the manifestation", and cried aloud, "The dead indeed shall arise and all those on earth shall rejoice". During this service the Body of Christ is carried in procession around the church. In some parishes the entire flower-bedecked Sepulcher, symbolizing the Tomb, is carried in the procession.

The entire congregation joins in singing the, three parts of the "Hymns of Praise" (there are approximately 300 hymns, but only a few are sung). After these hymns are sung, the priest sprinkles the Sepulcher and the whole congregation with fragrant water. There is a simultaneous praise of both the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ with their purpose of the redemption of man. We no longer lament the sufferings of the Crucified One; we now lament chiefly for our own sins because we are far from God. So these services should have a rather personal meaning of repentance and of strong faith in God.

Christians observe Good Friday with fasting, prayer, cleanliness, self-examination, confession and good works, in humility and, repentance so that the Grace of the Cross might descend upon them.

The Gospel reading is Matthew 27:62-66.

"Arise, O God, and judge Thou the earth....."

Great Holy Saturday Morning

(The service is Vespers and Divine Liturgy of Saturday evening sung by anticipation Saturday morning.)

Psalms are read and Resurrection hymns are sung which tell of Christ's descent into Hades. "Today Hades cried out groaning" is the hymn's description of the resurrection of Adam and the conquering of death. Thus this day's celebration is called "First Resurrection". Most of the readings of this day are from the Old Testament on the prophecies and promise of the conquering of death. On this day the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil is officiated. Apostle Paul exhorts the faithful: *"We were buried, therefore, with him by baptism unto death, so we, too, might walk in newness of life"*, Romans 4:6.

After the reading of the Epistle, the priest follows the custom of tossing of laurel, saying: "Arise, O God, and judge Thou the earth: for Thou shall take all heathen to Thine inheritance". The Cherubic hymn of this day is: "Let all mortal flesh keep silence and stand with fear and trembling.....", a thoughtful hymn of adoration and exaltation. The Divine Liturgy ends with the Communion Hymn: "So the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and He is risen to save us".

The readings are from Romans 6:3-11 and Matthew 28:1-20.

The Holy Sunday of Easter

(The service is Matins and Divine Liturgy of Sunday morning sung Saturday midnight. With this service the Pentecostarion starts. (50 days services)).

On Easter Sunday (Saturday midnight) the life-giving Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is celebrated. Before midnight, the Odes of Lamentation of the previous day are repeated. The Orthros of the Resurrection begins in complete darkness. The priest takes light from the vigil light and gives it to the faithful, who are holding candles. The priest sings: "Come ye and receive light from the unwaning life, and glorify Christ, who arose from the dead", and all the people join him in singing this hymn again and again. From this moment, every Christian holds the Easter candle as a symbol of his vivid, deep faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as Savior. In many churches the priest leads the people outside the church, where he reads the Gospel which refers to the Angels statement: "He is Risen; He is not here", Mark 16:1-8.

Then comes the breathless moment as the people wait for the priest to start the hymn of Resurrection, which they join him in singing, repeatedly: "Christ has Risen from the dead, by death trampling upon Death, and has bestowed life upon those in the tombs". From this moment the entire service takes on a joyous Easter atmosphere. The hymns of the *Odes and Praises of Resurrection* which follow are of superb meaning and expression. The people

confess, "It is the Day of Resurrection, let us be glorious, let us embrace one another and speak to those that hate us; let us forgive all things and so let us cry, Christ has arisen from the dead". By this hymn they admit that love of one's fellowman is the solid foundation of the faith in the Resurrection of Christ.

The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is then officiated. At the end of the Liturgy, a part of the marvelous festival sermon of St. Chrysostom is read, which calls upon the people to "Take part in this fair and radiant festival. Let no one be fearful of death, for the death of the Savior has set us free . . . O Death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is Thy victory? Christ is Risen and Thou art overthrown. To Him be glory and power from all ages to all ages".

The readings are Acts 1: 1-8 and John 1: 1-17.

"Peace be unto you....."

Easter Sunday Afternoon Vespers

Easter Sunday afternoon the faithful gather once more for prayer with lighted candles. All sing the hymn, "Christ is Risen from the Dead". The people greet one another joyously, saying: "Christ is Risen", the Easter salutation which is answered, "Truly He is Risen". They sing, "the dark shadows of the Law has passed away by the coming of grace", and standing in exaltation they exclaim, "Who is so great a God as our God?"

The Gospel according to John (20:19-25) is read in various languages, proclaiming the Good News of Resurrection all over the universe without discrimination. The fruit of faith in the Resurrection of the Lord is love in His Name; therefore, this day is called "Sunday of Agape" (love feast), a day dedicated to Christian principles, especially to forgiveness and charity. At this time, Christians seek to end misunderstanding and arguments among those whom they may be at odds. Apostle Paul firmly interprets the Resurrection of Christ, saying: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain", 1 Cor. 15:14. The Church also states in its Creed, "The Third day He rose again".

A Living Faith

Remembrance of the events of the last week in the life of Jesus Christ has a practical appeal to the heart of the Christian believer. One's beliefs constitute his being; the more our beliefs are true and firm, the more purposeful meaning life has. The Resurrection of Christ strengthens and illuminates our beliefs; this is our being. It is not only a belief in an historical fact which took place in a certain place and time, but it is marvelous in its nature. The

Resurrection of Christ in relation to His Crucifixion and Mystic Supper continue to be present in the mind of the believer as a fact as well as the source of "the power from above", for which the believer prays. Assurance of a personal participation in the enactment of the same events in the life of Christ becomes an unfaded happiness for the Christian.

This is the divine inheritance that the Church of Christ keeps as its treasure and solid foundation. The goal of a member of the Church is to keep his faith living and working in his everyday life and relations with others. The Christian will be recognized and identified as the friend and disciple of Jesus Christ. His beliefs will be like the flag which flies from the top of the centermost of his own ship, sailing to its divine destiny. The flag's inscription bears the assurance that "*Christ is Risen, Indeed*".

Easter Sermon

"IF ANY BE PIOUS AND A LOVER OF GOD, let him take part in this fair and radiant festival. If any be an honest servant, let him come in and rejoice in the joy of his Lord. If any have wearied himself with fasting, let him take part now in the recompense. If any have worked from the first hour, let him receive to-day his just dues. If any have arrived at the sixth, in no wise feast with thankfulness. If any have arrived at the sixth, in no wise let him be in doubt; in no way shall he suffer loss. If any arrive only at the eleventh, let him not be fearful for his slowness.

For the Master is munificent, and receives the last even as the first. He giveth rest to him of the eleventh, even as to him who has wrought from the first hour. And He is merciful to the last, and provides for the first. And to this one He gives, and to that one He shews kindness. And He receives their labours, and acknowledges the purpose. And he honours the action and praises the intention.

Wherefore enter ye all into the joy of our Lord, and let the first and the second take part in the reward. Ye rich and ye poor, join hands together. Ye strong and ye heedless, do honor to this day. Ye who fast and ye who fast not, be glad to-day. The table is full: do ye all fare sumptuously. The calf is ample: let no one go forth unsatisfied.

Let all take part in the banquet of Faith. Let all take part in the wealth of Righteousness. Let no one lament for poverty, for the Kingdom is made manifest for all. Let no one bewail transgressions, for forgiveness has dawned from the tomb. Let no one be fearful of Death, for the death of the Savior has set us free. He has quenched it by being subdued by it.

He Who came down into Hades, despoiled Hades; and Hades was embittered

when it tasted of His Flesh. Isaiah, anticipating this cried and said: Hades was embittered when below it met Thee face to face. It was embittered for it war rendered void. It was embittered for it was mocked. It was embittered for it was slain. It was embittered for it was despoiled. It was embittered for it was fettered. It received a Body, and encountered God. It received mortal dust, and met Heaven face to face. It received what it saw, and fell whither it saw not.

O Death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory? Christ is risen and thou are overthrown. Christ is risen and the demons have fallen. Christ is risen and the Angels rejoice. Christ is risen and there is none dead in the tomb. For Christ is raised from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. To Him be glory and power from all Ages to all ages. Amen."

St. John Chrysostom