

*GUIDE TO THE HOLY PASCHA WEEK*



## GUIDE TO THE HOLY PASCHA WEEK

Without question, the Holy Pascha week is the holiest week of the entire year. The artistic beauty and spiritual depth of the rites of the Coptic Orthodox church are at its zenith during this week. Christ's crucifixion and resurrection are the foundation upon which is built the whole fabric of Christianity. This document seeks to serve as a guide through the journey of our Lord Jesus Christ through His passion and crucifixion. The content of this document was gathered from two main sources: The Way from Jerusalem to Golgotha by Father Bishoy Kamel and Pascha by St. Athanasius Coptic Orthodox Church of Los Angeles, CA.

### CHURCH TRADITION

During Holy Week the Church reenacts before us the entire passion of Christ. We do, within the confines of the church building, what the early Christians did in Jerusalem every year during this week. The early Christians used to celebrate Holy Week by visiting and praying at each site where the events had originally taken place.

The early Church had understood the great importance of Holy Week and took several steps to devote this week to the Lord. The level of asceticism (fasting, prayer, metanias, vigil) was at its maximum. They only ate bread and salt, abstaining from any cooked food or dessert. They considered it inappropriate to taste anything sweet while commemorating the suffering of the Lord and also tried to avoid the distractions of cooking. Women did not wear jewelry or make up, and devoted all of their time for worship and devotion. Most Christians also abstained from food from Good Friday until Easter service, spending the whole week in the church.

Emperor Theodosius, a Christian king, ordered a universal holiday during this time so that all those working within the government or private business sector could assemble in prayer and devotion as one family. Masters alleviated their slaves from working during this week, allowing them to worship in the Church. Prisoners were even set free to go to Church and join in the ceremonial prayers.

The early Church used to celebrate Pascha once every 33 years. But because many died without ever celebrating this feast, the church decided to celebrate it once every year. Initially, there was some discrepancy between the Church of Antioch (which celebrated Easter on Passover, the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, even if it was not a Sunday) and the Churches of Rome and Alexandria (which set Easter as the Sunday following the Passover). The Council of Nicea resolved this by setting its date as the latter.

Our blessed Church has set the schedule of prayers and readings to correspond with the journey, the teaching, and the events that lead up to the crucifixion. The hymns, sermons and meditations are so expositive that the catechumens used to learn the entire story of Christ during this one week.

### CHURCH SETTING

Under the Old Testament law, the sin offering was to be burned outside of the camp so that the camp would not be defiled by the sins of the congregations (Leviticus 4:12, 21). In a similar manner, Christ had taken away the sins of the world outside of Jerusalem. The Church follows the example of the Old Testament and Christ's sacrifice by celebrating all of the prayers of Pascha outside of the main church, the altar. Instead, the Holy Week prayers are done in the middle section of the church. No one enters the Altar because the Lord Christ's suffering and crucifixion took place outside of Jerusalem. As St. Paul explains, we go outside the camp: ***"Let us go forth therefore unto Him outside the camp bearing His reproach."*** (Hebrews 13:13). We do not go near the sanctuary, for we remember how the door to the heavens were closed before the crucifixion. We enter with Him on Holy Thursday, as we commemorate the Eucharist. Then we continue with Him for the remainder of the events in Jerusalem.

Additionally, black veils are placed on the pulpit, draped along the walls and wrapped around the columns of the church. The atmosphere is transferred into one of intense mourning, so that we may participate in the Lord's sufferings. As St. Paul explained, ***"that I may know Him and the power of His Resurrection and the sharing of His sufferings."*** (Philippians 3:10)

## **THE SACRAMENTS**

Throughout Holy Week, the Church focuses again on the sufferings of the Lord. There is no raising of incense to be made during the first three days. Consequently, during this time, none of the sacraments are performed (except for confession). The first sacrament allowable outside of this is the Divine Liturgy celebrated on Holy Thursday. For this reason, the Church prepares the congregation for the lack of these sacraments by having general services.

The Sixth Sunday of Lent is also known as Baptism Sunday, where most of the catechumens and children would be baptized so that they may receive communion and prepare for Easter. On the Last Friday of Lent, a general Unction of the Sick service is held. After a series of prayers over Holy Oil, the priest anoints the congregation with the oil for the healing of their sicknesses and diseases. Additionally, after Palm Sunday, there is a general funeral service. There are only two Divine Liturgies celebrated throughout the entire Passion Week, on Holy Thursday and Bright Saturday. Both are prayed with minimal hymns, since most of the hymns of the Liturgy are joyous ones.

## **THE HYMNS OF PASCHA**

It has been said that the hymns of the Coptic Orthodox Church are among the oldest ecclesiastical chants still chanted today in the entire world. The service of the ritual is interspersed with a number of hymns of great antiquity and amazing magnificence. The mournful tunes fill us with comfort and inner relief. They lead man into impalpability and transcendence over worldliness to rest in the serenity and peace of God. In addition to these hymns, most parts of the Holy Week service are set to plain tunes—simple in their structure, but matchless in their penetration and their power to bring man into the depth of devotion thereby filling him with celestial ecstasy.

The Paschal hymn is perhaps the great hallmark of the entire week. Its repetition leads to one of great depth and internal reflection. The church repeats this one hymn twelve times in each hour to replace the twelve psalms for each prayer of the canonical hour. Its words are very simple, comprised of only twelve words in Coptic, thirteen in English. Not only is the Paschal hymn a psalm of prayer, it is also a historical sermon. It becomes a simple introduction, not only to the prayer of our Heavenly Father, but into the life of our dear Lord. As our beloved Pope Shenouda III writes:

The Lord Christ left Jerusalem to Bethany, where we follow Him, saying, *“Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing.”* The Chief Priests were annoyed when the Lord cleared the Temple, and said “By what authority are you doing these things?” But we say, *“Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing, and the Majesty, Emmanuel our God and our King.”* They planned to kill Him while we defend Him saying, *“Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing.”* The Lord in humility, bent to wash the Disciples’ feet, and we praise Him saying, *“Thine is the Power and the Glory, the Blessing and the Majesty.”* The Lord prayed at Gethsemane in such agony that His sweat became as drops of blood and we proclaim, *“Thine is the Power and the Glory, the Blessing and the Majesty.”* We follow Him hour by hour; when arrested, put under trial in the presence of His enemies, crowned with thorns, flogged, falling under the Cross, nailed, till He commended His Spirit into the hands of the Father and when He took the robber on His right with Him into Paradise, and we continually chant unto Him the hymn, *“Thine is the Power and the Glory, the Blessing and the Majesty, forever Amen”*

## **THE HOURS and GOSPEL READINGS**

This is the only time during the year that we do not read from the Agpeya. This is because its prayers encompass the entire life of Christ (prophecies, nativity, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, etc.); but during Holy Week, we simply focus on the Passion of our Lord. Consequently, there are separate prayers for each hour.

The Didache also mandated the reading of all the books of the Bible, including the Old and New Testaments. Since this became difficult due to the Christians’ occupation with other business, Pope Gabriel the 70<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria, selected some of the prophecies from the Old Testament, Psalms, and the New Testaments that memorialized the Passion of our Savior. He then distributed them among the daily hours and

compiled it into the Holy Pascha. This book was then reorganized and revisited by H.G. Bishop Peter, Bishop of Bahnasa. Bishop Peter added some of the sermons and homilies of the early Fathers of the Church.

Each day during Pascha has a morning and evening service. The Morning and Evening service contain five separate hours:

	<i>Morning Service</i>	<i>Evening Service</i>
• <b>1<sup>st</sup> hour</b>	6 am	6 pm
• <b>3<sup>rd</sup> hour</b>	9 am	9 pm
• <b>6<sup>th</sup> hour</b>	12 (noon)	12 (midnight)
• <b>9<sup>th</sup> hour</b>	3 pm	3 am
• <b>11<sup>th</sup> hour</b>	5 pm	5 am

Each of the above hours are divided into six separate sections:

- 1) **Prophecies and Poetry**
  - Number of readings vary from 2-5 (except on Good Friday 18 are read)
  - Most of the readings are from the book of Isaiah. By Easter, the Church would have finished the entire book. Isaiah contains the most prophecies.
  - Each hour generally has one prophecy explaining how Jerusalem would treat the Messiah, and one chapter (usually Proverbs or Sirach) discussing the importance of wisdom, fear of God, righteousness, etc.
  - As in the great Lent, the first prophecy is the same theme as the Pauline (during Lent), the Gospel, and the sermon. The other prophecies fulfill the first prophecy. They are arranged to fit the life of Christ during His days on earth.
- 2) **Homilies** (only are read in the first, ninth and eleventh hours of Monday-Thursday)
- 3) **Doxology of the Pascha** (Thine is the power, the glory...). The community joins together in singing, "Thine is the Power..." twelve times (six towards the North and six towards the South), followed by the Lord's Prayer. This beautiful praise is repeated continuously. Humans did not create this praise, as many may believe. Rather, the praise is of divine inspiration, as the psalms. It is taken from the Book of Revelation. Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever (Revelation 4:9), they say with loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12). The Church joins the angels who are before the throne of God praising the Living One forever.
 

Beginning at the Eleventh Hour of Wednesday, we add "my Good Savior" to the praise, strongly attesting that Christ's sufferings for our salvation began when the high priests and the elders were consulting the arrest of Jesus and plotting His death. Beginning at the vigil of Friday, and continuing throughout the day, we add "my salvation" to the praise, emphasizing that the Church recognizes that salvation is fulfilled on the Cross.
- 4) **Psalm and Gospel.** The Church selects verses and Psalms that relate to the sufferings of Christ to be read in a sad tune. Following the Psalm, the introduction of the Gospel is either read or chanted. "We beseech our Lord and God that we may be made worthy to hear to the Holy Gospel. In wisdom, let us attend to the Holy Gospel". The psalms contain many prophecies on the life of Jesus from His birth to His ascension. Considering that at this time we are commemorating the agony of Christ, the Church chooses texts that are connected with the events.
- 5) **Expositions** (el Tarh)
- 6) **Litanies** for the church (clergy, servants, catechumens), the sick, the poor, the leaders and rulers, the whole world... (Prostrations during the daytime litanies except Sunday)
- 7) **12 Lord Have Mercy's**
- 8) **Final Hymn** (O King of Peace)
- 9) **Benediction**

## HOW TO BENEFIT SPIRITUALLY FROM THE HOLY PASSION WEEK

### 1. Our Behavior Inside and Outside of Church

It is very noticeable that many people during Passion Week are one thing inside church and completely different outside. Inside church, black curtains, somber hymns, solemn readings, and concentrating on the suffering of Christ. Outside of church, we often laugh, joke around, socialize, think and talk about many worldly issues. We lose all the spiritual depth that we gained inside church. Let us concentrate our thoughts, conversations, and meditations around the events of this holy week and the Passion of our Savior.

### 2. Retreat

During our regular fasting days, we put the words of the Bible before us, ***“Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly”*** (Joel 1:14). How much more then should we apply this commandment during Holy Week? This week should be characterized by solitude and retreat with God, by staying away from idle discussions and various means of entertainment of pleasure. Reserve your time to God and to spiritual activities worthy of this week.

### 3. Follow the Steps of Christ

Meditate on the events of the week one by one: from Palm Sunday, when Christ refused His worldly kingdom and the Jews gave up their hope in Him, until they crucified and buried Him.

On Palm Sunday, ask yourself, “Is Christ King and Lord over everything in my life? Do I, like Christ, turn down worldly glory for spiritual and eternal glory? During the General Funeral Service, do I consider myself attending my own funeral?”

And when the church denounces Judas’ traitorous kiss on the eve of the Wednesday of Passion Week, ask yourself in prayer, “How often, O Lord have I betrayed You? How many times have I told You words of love in prayers, while my actions show the opposite and my heart is far away from You?”

### 4. Share in the Fellowship of His Suffering.

Saint Paul said, ***“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being conformed to His death”*** (Philippians 3:10). Can we give ourselves an exercise this week to share in the fellowship of His suffering and be conformed to His death? Can we follow Him in His suffering and ascend with Him to the Cross? Can we say with St. Paul, ***“With Christ I have been crucified; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”*** (Galatians 2:20)?

Therefore, in order for Christ to live in us, we have to carry our cross and follow Him. If you have a cross in your life, do not complain about it. Instead, rejoice in it and bear it for Christ’s sake. ***“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him but to suffer for His sake”*** (Philippians 1:29).

### 5. Asceticism

Whoever puts the suffering of Christ before him will not take any pleasure in eating and drinking or pampering the body. But in order to succeed in pursuing asceticism, we must satisfy our souls with spiritual food so that it may thrive and overcome physical hunger.

### 6. Spiritual Readings

Spiritual readings are also food for the soul. The church has organized for us a treasure of appropriate readings for every day of Holy Week, comprised of Gospel readings, Old Testament prophecies that correspond to the events of each day, spiritual explanations and sermons of the Church Fathers. On Bright Saturday (Apocalypse night) the church reads the entire Book of Revelation.

### 7. Hymns

The hymns of the Passion Week are moving and full of spiritual depth. Hymns, like reading, preserve the thought from wandering and guide it in spiritual direction.

### 8. Prayer

Since the prayers of the Agpeya are not used during Holy Week, we are to substitute personal prayers in their place, in addition to the intensive prayers of the church, asking the Lord who bore the sins of the world and died for us to forgive and have mercy upon us according to His great mercy.

### 9. Confession and Communion

During this week, each person must sit with himself and remember his sins and put them on Christ's shoulders and tell Him in shame, "Carry O Lord my sins too, with the sins of the rest of humanity. Take my sins and nail them to the Cross with You, so that Your Blood may wipe them away!"

Look carefully at your sins and know that they are the cause of His crucifixion. Many people cry out of their sorrow for Christ's suffering while they crucify Him every day with their sins. We should not feel sorry for Christ during this week, but should be sorry for our sins that caused Him these pains. As Jesus told the women that were crying over Him, "*Daughters of Jerusalem, do not cry for Me, but cry for yourselves and your children*" (Luke 23:28).

Before the Cross, we all stand as sinners, all under the condemnation. "*No one is righteous, not even one*" (Psalm 14:3). We confess our sins and prepare ourselves for communion. There are three liturgies during Holy Week: on Passover Thursday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday (preceded, of course, by the Liturgy of Palm Sunday).

### 10. Spiritual Storage

Passion Week is not an opportunity to benefit for a week only, but a time to store up spiritual nourishment enough to last the whole year, particularly needed during the 50 days after the Resurrection when there is no fasting.

## DIVISION OF THE DAYS OF THE HOLY PASCHA

### LAZARUS SATURDAY

On this day, Christ went to Bethany, where He resurrected Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha (John 11). Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Christ had raised from the dead. There they made a supper for Him. Martha served, Lazarus attended near Christ at the table, and Mary sat at His feet.

### PALM SUNDAY

During the matins prayer of Palm Sunday, the church makes a procession of twelve stations around the Church, similar to the one made during the Feast of the Cross. At each station, a gospel reading is read in front of the icon commemorating a saint, group of saints, or an event. After the gospel is read, a special response is said for that saint or event with the Palm Sunday Tune (Hosanna tune).

St. John's gospel tells us that Jesus headed for Jerusalem the day after the supper, where He made a public entry (John 12:13). Thus, the following day was a Sunday, the 10<sup>th</sup> Nisan. This is the day all Israelites select a lamb from their herd, the paschal lamb, and keep it until the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month for slaughtering (Ex. 12:1-36).

Paschal lambs were selected and preserved for few days in the holy city. Similarly, God's lamb bearing the sin of the world remained inside the walls of Jerusalem for few days, traveling between the temple and Bethany. When it was due time for the Redemption to be accomplished, Jesus entered Jerusalem with great celebrations, as prophesied by Zechariah in the book of Zechariah. "Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion, and proclaim daughter of Jerusalem: Behold, the King cometh unto thee: He is just and triumphal, riding upon an ass and upon a colt..." (Zech. 9:9).

Jesus left His native land of Galilee to minister in Judea and Berea on the way to Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus Christ was received in Jerusalem with a parade of onlookers, men women and children cheering joyfully with palms in hand, spreading their garments under His feet. Jesus entered Jerusalem with a modest procession, riding upon a colt. Although Jesus entered unknown and unlike a worldly king, He inspired awe and fear (spiritual

kingdom) and "... all the city was moved, saying: 'Who is this?'" (Matt 21:10), thus declaring their acceptance of His kingdom. Children welcomed Him with joy, proclaiming His kingdom as they cried "Hosanna to the son of David (Mat. 21:15)." Concurrently, those whose hearts were hardened said unto Him, "Hearest thou what they say?" Jesus responded by saying to them, and also to us, "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings He had perfected praise" (Matthew 21:16).

With the entrance of the King into our hearts and our lives, we are welcoming a new life in Christ. The Church commemorates the entrance of our Lord into our inward Jerusalem to establish His Kingdom in us and gather all to Himself. During the Matins prayer, there is a procession inside the sanctuary, indicating that the procession of the redeemed believers starts by God's plan of Christ's self-oblation. The procession then proceeds through the nave, before the icons of all the apostles, martyrs and saints.

During the Liturgy, each of the four gospels are read, each one facing a different direction as the fulfillment of the prophesy that the gospel will be preached throughout the world (N, S, E, W). The four gospels clearly announce the beginning of Christ's Kingdom and delineate the conditions to accept His Kingdom. (Matt 21:1-17); (Mark 11:1-11); (Luke 9:29-48) and (John 12:12-19).

But this joy is neither complete nor consistent. The scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees envied Him and the love that the people had for Him. As the children cheered the Messiah these Jewish leaders questioned Him by saying, "***By what authority are You doing these things?***" (Matthew 21:23) Even the people themselves would soon turn against Him just a few days later. Now they were shouting "Hosanna!" but in a few days, they would be shrieking, "***Crucify Him, crucify Him!***" (Luke 23:21) Such a great paradox and irony is one of the main themes throughout the entire week.

On Saturday, Nisan ninth of the Year 5534 of the creation, our Lord Jesus participated in the supper prepared at the house of Simon the Leper, in a village called Bethany (house of sorrow). This is the village of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. As told in the gospel of St. John, the supper occurred six days before the Passover. "During the supper, Mary took a very costly ointment of spikenard and anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair" (John 12:12). Six days before the Passover was a Sabbath day.

At the conclusion of the day, Jesus entered the temple and cast out sin and hypocrisy. Jesus makes it clear that He rejects those who sell the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He also shows the extent of relentless judgment for those who reject the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Having established His reign, Jesus can say "My house" while claiming His zeal for its cleanliness.

This is the day of extreme happiness and the beginning of the week of sorrows. We enter the church with palm leaves and hymns of joy; we leave draped in sorrow and mourning. As St. Andrew, bishop of Crete said, "*Let us run to accompany Him as He hastens toward His passion, and imitate those who met Him then, not by covering His path with garments, olive branches or palms, but by doing all we can to prostrate ourselves before Him by being humble and trying to live as He would wish.*"

## **GENERAL FUNERAL SERVICE**

As discussed earlier, a general funeral service is held on Palm Sunday following the Liturgy. This general service is conducted at the end of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Because no incense is raised for the departed during Holy Week and none of the departed are prayed upon in the church, the Church provides for this general funeral service for the souls that depart during these holy days. This service is held by saying special prayers on water before the altar in the choir of deacons. Following the funeral prayers, the priest blesses the people with water for this purpose.

We have heard that the resurrection has overcome death. Consequently, the first words of the whole week are (Ez. 37:1-14). This passage assures us that the crucified life in Jesus Christ raises to life those who were dead through sin, though they had become "very dry bones". Hence, we have reason to rejoice. The Church addresses these words to our hearts and minds: "I shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live... I will cover you with flesh and skin, and put breath in you and you shall live" (Ez. 37:6). This theme is reiterated throughout the Bible. In a

reading from I Corinthians, we hear that “Christ is risen from the dead and become the ‘first fruits’ of them that slept” (I Corinthians 15:20).

The Gospel according to St. John 5:19-29 also speaks of our life in Christ, reminding us “the hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God... and they that hear shall live...And shall come forth, they that have done well, unto the resurrection of life” (John 5:28,29).

The Church warns us to start Holy Week with no evil in our hearts, so that we may benefit from these holy days. Brothers, this is the way towards the Cross: “Do not despise the riches of His goodness and forbearance...”(Rom. 2:4). “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men” (Rom. 1:18).

#### *Morning hours*

- 9<sup>th</sup>: cleansing of the temple.
- 11<sup>th</sup>: prophecies focus on the wrath of God on His enemies (Nahum 1:2-8).

#### *Evening hours*

- 1<sup>st</sup>: lamenting, destruction of Jerusalem, vengeance of God (Zephaniah); We echo the Greeks request who asked Philip, “Sir, we would like to see Jesus”
- 3<sup>rd</sup>: distress, desolation (Zephaniah); “Who do you say that I am?”
- 6<sup>th</sup>: weep, mourn, sackcloth, fig trees dried up (Joel) Christ prophesied about His suffering and crucifixion.
- 9<sup>th</sup>: weeping will not remove the reproach (Micah) Christ again asks what the people say about Him as they travel to Caesarea Philippi.
- 11<sup>th</sup>: the Lord will not hear their cries (Micah) the special power of fasting

### **MONDAY—THE FIG TREE**

Monday we focus first on the story of Adam and Eve: their creation (1<sup>st</sup> hour prophecy), their sin, and their removal from the Garden of Eden (9<sup>th</sup> hour prophecy). We see once they sinned they could not remain any longer in Eden because good and evil cannot coexist. (11<sup>th</sup> hour Homily).

On the evening of Palm Sunday our Lord went with his disciples outside the city. Along the way to Bethany, Christ was hungry; and He cursed a fig tree with many leaves but no fruit (1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> hour). This was a symbol of the Jewish nation, which had the outward appearance of fruits, because they had followed the letter of the law. But they lacked fruit in that they did not abide by the Spirit of the law and “neglected the weightier things of the law.” They continued to question His authority even to the last moment (9<sup>th</sup> hour gospel). Christ had rejected the Jews, as they were plotting to slaughter Him. The church is reminding us that we should not think of this week as simply an outer appearance of worship without sowing the fruits of repentance, love, and meekness.

As Adam and Eve covered their sin with the fig tree, Christ rebukes the fig tree to tell us that we can no longer cover our sins with a cloak of hypocrisy. As St. John Chrysostom said, “*The fig tree with its broad leaves represents the wide road. Also it reminds us of the sin which Adam tried to cover with its leaves.*” Adorn yourselves with virtue so we will not experience the wrath of God, but His mercy. We cannot be hypocritical (11<sup>th</sup> hour prophesy of Sirach). Even our churches cannot have good and bad fruits (11<sup>th</sup> hour Homily).

### **VIGIL OF MONDAY**

The objective of this evening is to get ready. We are to get ready to share Christ’s sufferings. This can only be achieved through faith. We are also to get ready for His Second Coming. This starts at the Cross, as the Cross is doom for those who refuse to be saved, and victory for the saved. “For the message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (I Cor. 1:18).

The five readings of this evening (the first, third, sixth, ninth and eleventh hours) call our attention, warning us that the day of the Lord is near and calling us to get ready. In these readings, the Lord explains to His disciples the inevitable necessity of the Cross for the salvation of the world.



## EVENTS

Jesus leaves the house of Bethany, situated on the Mount of Olives. Bethany is referred to as the village of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, and is located about 15 minutes from Jerusalem (John 11:18). Jesus goes to the temple, where He spends His days during the week. The evenings are spent resting in Bethany (Luke 21:27-38).

On His way to the temple, Jesus curses a fruitless fig tree (Mat. 20:18,19) and (Mark 11:12-20). Jesus curses the fig tree because it has leaves, but no fruits. Usually, fruits grow at the same time as leaves on a fig tree. St. Mark remarks that this is no season for ripe figs and that there should be no leaves on the tree, either. Thus, the presence of leaves is a false promise of fruits, a kind of pretense. Jesus takes the tree as a symbol of the Jewish nation. The nation boasts to be a blessed people because of the Law, the temple and the religious rituals related to the fasting and offering of sacrifices. However, the nation lacks the faith, love and holiness to accept Jesus Christ and obey His commandments.

It appears that the Lord did not curse the tree because it had no fruits, but because the leaves gave a false promise of fruits. This is how God rebukes a fruitless person. “These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving [only] themselves. [They are] clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.” (Jude 1:12,13).

On the same day, Jesus enters the temple. In the temple, Jesus casts out the people who are selling and buying. Jesus will not suffer anyone to carry vessels through the temple (Mark 11:15,16). Jesus compares the temple to a ‘den of thieves’ because the buyers and sellers are disturbing the holiness of the temple, referred to as “My Father’s house”. Jesus wants to tell them, “You have dishonored my house with your trade. You are cheating God’s rights. You have transformed the divine sanctuary into a marketplace for material profit, depriving those who come for worship from the opportunity to raise their hearts to God in the holy place designed for adoration. You are robbing the strangers, extorting their money against the goods they are buying for sacrifices.

The cursing of the fig tree and the casting out of the traders are the most important events on Monday. Throughout the rest of the day, Jesus is teaching and performing miracles, infuriating the high priests and the guardians of the temple. For this purpose, the Church organizes the readings of Monday and the vigil of Tuesday to be centered around the cursed tree that had leaves and no fruits and the use of the temple for a materialistic trade.

The Church makes it clear that to be able to live in Christ, as our Savior teaches us through the parables, we should be aware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. The true physician of souls knows the danger of hypocrisy and where the disease lies. He loves the publicans and the sinners whose healing He can foresee. Furthermore, Jesus tells the woman caught in sin, “Neither I, do condemn thee” (John 8:11). On the other hand, Jesus has no pity for hypocrisy because it is the root of all diseases. By justifying the sinner in his own eyes, hypocrisy prevents a sinner from healing. As we begin to commemorate the sufferings of our Lord, let us prepare our hearts for the Holy Spirit to help us escape from hypocrisy so that we may benefit from His fruits during the Holy Pascha.

### *Morning*

- 1<sup>st</sup>: Adam and Eve (Genesis); the parable of the vineyard (Isaiah); the importance of wisdom and the fear of the Lord (Sirach); guardian angels (St. Shenouda’s homily); the fig tree (gospel).
- 3<sup>rd</sup>: God will send forth His wrath with the approaching armies (Isaiah). Thus, the Lord will scatter His people b/c of their lust and the people will mourn (Jeremiah). But the house of the Lord will be their only salvation (Psalm) just as Christ had entered into the Temple (Mark).
- 6<sup>th</sup>: The sacrifices God initially gave Moses, as a means forgiveness of sin (Exodus), was no longer acceptable. Instead of discipline and wisdom, they brought about punishment and vengeance (Solomon). So Christ had made a whip of cords and drove out all of the sheep and doves in the temple (John).

- 9<sup>th</sup>: When Adam and Eve sinned, God cast them out of Eden (Genesis). But God has promised to forgive His people; so we should be prepared for His forgiveness (Isaiah), fear God and be wise (Proverbs). *Special exposition!*
- 11<sup>th</sup>: We were sold into slavery because of our sins (Isaiah), another warning of hypocrisy (Sirach). St. Shenouda's homily especially connects Adam and Eve's sin w/ hypocrisy.

*Evening:*

- 1<sup>st</sup>: God asks us to repent (Zechariah) or we shall not enter the narrow gate (Luke);
- 3<sup>rd</sup>: People try to warn Christ that Herod is trying to kill Him (Luke)
- 6<sup>th</sup>: Moses gets angry with the people for worshipping idols (Exodus). Christ tells us that eating excessively weighs down the body; instead keep watch and stay alert (Luke, Exposition).
- 9<sup>th</sup>: Woe to you Pharisees! (Luke)
- 11<sup>th</sup>: Keep watch and pray (Mark)

**TUESDAY—THE DAY OF PARABLES (and Prophecies)**

After Christ comments on the fig tree that has died, Christ began to teach in many parables such as the Parable of the Talents (11<sup>th</sup> hour gospel). Christ also prophesied about the destruction of the Temple, the signs of Jerusalem's desolation and of His Second Coming (9<sup>th</sup> hour gospel). In the evening the Jews plotted with Judas to betray our Lord.

**EVENTS**

Throughout this day, the Lord explains ideas and secrets that the disciples had wondered about. According to the events narrated in the four gospels, the Lord starts the day by passing the fig tree that had been cursed the previous day. The tree was now dry to the roots. Peter says, "O Master, the fig tree You cursed has dried". Jesus immediately answers "Have faith in God" (Mark 11:21).

Jesus spends the remainder of the day answering questions from His disciples, as well as from the Pharisees and Sadducees, who had come to trap Him through malicious questions. They ask if it is lawful to pay tribute to Caesar (Matt. 22:15-22). The Sadducees, who deny the resurrection, ask about the resurrection (Matt. 22:34-40). The Lord speaks about His Second Coming and Doomsday, warning us to keep watch and be ready, throughout the majority of the day. He tells the parable of the wicked vineyard keepers (Matt. 21:33-46), of the marriage of the king's son (Matt. 22:1-14), of the temple falling into ruins (Matt. 24:1-14), and of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1:13). After the day's teaching, Jesus goes to Bethany to rest. Meanwhile, the high priests and the elders of the people plan His death (Matt. 26:1-16).

On Tuesday, the Church stresses the Second Coming, the end of the world and the urge to get ready. This is the day our Savior lovingly invites us to keep watching with our lamps lit.

**SIXTH HOUR**

The first three hours invite the believers to unite with the Lord. Believers are urged to not forget His covenant, His judgments and His commandments that lead to eternal life. "I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you." (Josh. 2:9). This is the life promised in the Second Coming.

The prophecy of Joshua, on the Third Hour, stresses the importance of going through the narrow gate (as already attested on Monday), in order to obtain eternal life. The prophecy from I Kings tells how Israel erred and killed the prophets, causing our Savior to lament over Jerusalem. This is repeated in the Gospel of the hour, "O Jerusalem, you killed the Prophets ..." (Mat. 23:37). The description of the ruin of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple is a pale image of the tribulations of the end of the world.

The readings show that the Kingdom is no longer the monopoly of a chosen nation or people. "...because Israel has not obtained what He seeks for; rather those who were chosen have obtained it" (Rom. 11:7). Furthermore, the Gospel according to St. Matthew tells us "The Kingdom of God shall be taken from (Israel), and given to a nation bringing forth fruits" (Matt. 21:43). The Lord opens paradise to people from any nation or language since they have kept the covenant.

## NINTH HOUR

The prophesy from Genesis 6:1 – 9:6 relates the story of the flood and Noah's ark, and is explained in the Gospel of the Third Hour of Wednesday vigil. The Gospel tells us "before the flood, the sons of men used to eat, drink, and multiply until the day Noah entered the ark as ordered by God (Matt. 24:36). They knew not about the flood by which "every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the earth" (Gen. 7:23). In the same way, on His second coming, all will be taken by surprise. In the same way eight people only were spared by the flood. "Who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while [the] ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water." (I Peter 3:20). We must remember Jesus' alarming words, "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). This gospel is read on the First Hour of the evening.

## ELEVENTH HOUR

The readings of the Psalm and the Gospel, in perfect accordance, are inspired by the Holy Spirit to illustrate God sitting in His glory to judge and reward each one according to his acts. Psalm 44 exclaims, "Your throne, o God..."(Psalm 44:6). The Gospel makes a similar exclamation, saying "...on the throne of Your glory" (Matt. 25:31). Psalm 41 gives us the promise, "...in the day of distress, God shall save him" (Psalm 41:1). The Gospel echoes this encouragement, "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did [it] to one of the least of these My brethren, you did to Me.'"(Matt. 25:40). The Psalms are sung as a beautiful symphony, glorifying the One seated on His throne.

Starting at the Eleventh Hour of Tuesday, we add " My Good Savior" to "Thine is the glory...". The Church wants us to realize that our Lord Jesus has specified the time of His crucifixion as we read the Gospel of that hour. "After two days is the feast of the Passover and the Son of Man shall be betrayed to be crucified" (Matt. 26:2).

### *Morning*

- 1<sup>st</sup>: We must understand the special calling that we have as Christians. Just as God emphasized to Moses that the people of Israel were chosen (Exodus), so to God has called us for a special calling. Christ emphasized this when telling His disciples, "I am not of this world" (John).
- 3<sup>rd</sup>: As Jerusalem will kill the King of Peace and stone the prophets (Psalm), so too Christ promises that Jerusalem will be completely ruined and no stone shall be left in tact (John).
- 6<sup>th</sup>: The Lord shall draw His sword and destroy the sinner (Ezekiel). This sword of fire is held by Christ, the True Light of the world (John).
- 9<sup>th</sup>: After the Flood, Noah Built an altar (Exodus); wisdom has built a house with 7 pillars, or Sacraments (Proverbs). The Lord is coming (Isaiah) but when He comes, do not be deceived by false prophets, and look to the heavens for which He will return. (Matthew)
- 11<sup>th</sup>: **Parable of the Talents**

### *Evening:*

- 1<sup>st</sup>: We are like metals that must be purified by the coppersmith (Ezekiel); we must be pure enough to wear the wedding garment or we will be cast out of heaven (Matthew)
- *Exposition:* explains how Judas was the man without the heavenly garment that was denied salvation b/c he denied Christ's blessings and betrayed Him.
- 3<sup>rd</sup>: I hate your feasts! (Amos) Christ explains how such feasts ended when God sent the flood; instead be a watchful servant and not a hypocrite (Matthew).
- 6<sup>th</sup>: Parable of the Ten Virgins
- 9<sup>th</sup>: Israel was chosen to be a vine yielding abundant fruit (Hosea), but was also condemned for killing the prophets of God and for this God rejects them from His house (Matthew).
- 11<sup>th</sup>: According to their tradition, the Jews went up to the mountain to purge and purify themselves (John, Exposition). When they did not see Christ, they wondered among themselves if He would come (John).

## WEDNESDAY: DAY OF LOVE AND BETRAYAL

This is another day of extremes. In this one day, we read of the extreme love of Mary of Bethany—how much she sacrificed her livelihood to anoint Him for His burial. At the same time, we witness the betrayal of one of Christ's disciples that He chose, raised and taught for over three years.

Bethany was just over the hill from Jerusalem. A few weeks earlier, Christ had come at Martha and Mary's request to raise their brother Lazarus from the dead. After this great event, He had avoided Jerusalem because the Jewish authorities became determined to arrest Him.

Christ spent the entire day alone in Bethany before the great day of redemption. Perhaps the family had tried to hide Christ secretly, for they realized that there was danger in harboring this wanted Man. As the Jews separated the Passover lamb until its slaughter day, Jesus rested in Bethany during that day before offering Himself to be slaughtered.

Martha had expressed her gratitude to Christ for resurrecting her brother from the dead by preparing a meal for Him. But Mary, the less conventional sister, now takes it upon herself to perform an unthinkable act of love. She first takes a very expensive flask of perfume. This alabaster flask, alone, was precious. So much so that once used, it could never be used again because the neck of the flask had to be broken to release the perfume. Even more precious was the perfume, harboring a special aroma worth fortunes that came from the Himalayas. It was worth 300 dinari—a family could have lived for a year on the price of this perfume. Mary goes even further. She does not even allow a servant to wash His feet, but personally anoints Him out of her love and humility—exactly what Christ would teach His disciples within 24 hours!

To continue along the Paschal theme, there is joy within sadness and sadness in the midst of joy in these very two stories. The anointing of Christ's feet was a joyous act of thanksgiving for bringing the dead alive, while at the same time a foreshadowing of Christ's death and burial. As they celebrate the welcoming of their brother, they were saying goodbye to their Savior.

Judas had criticized her for wasting the cost of this perfume on Christ by saying it could have been used for the poor. But Christ encourages her work and service for Him, for she had done this for His burial. Mary gave out of her heart; Judas had criticized her out of his selfishness. Mary sacrificed her life and all her money for Christ; Judas stole from the moneybox and betrayed Him for 30 silver coins. Mary acted out of loyalty, Judas out of betrayal. He thought of money, while forgetting about the Lord. Mary is serving the poor through the Lord; Judas is preventing and discouraging service to both.

Judas also sought opportunity to betray Jesus. According to church tradition, kisses and greetings are forbidden from the First Hour of the Eve of Thursday (Wednesday night) until the end of the Divine Liturgy on Bright Saturday. This is to remember the betrayal of Christ by Judas with a kiss.

The prophecies continue along the story of Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness. In the first hour prophesy, the people are complaining that there is no water to drink. After we see their lack of faith, the remaining prophecies remind us of how faithful God was to them in their escape from Egypt. In the third hour, we read of the first instance where God the Israelites a guides His people with a cloud of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night. In the Sixth Hour, we are reminded of how the children of Israel miraculously escaped from the hands of Pharaoh and his army when crossing the Red Sea. Despite all of these blessings and rescues, the people continue to complain that they don't have figs, vines, fruit or water in the prophesy of the ninth hour.

## **EVENTS**

The Lord spends the day in Bethany. He left the temple on Tuesday evening with no intent of coming back. On Tuesday, Jesus said to the Jews "your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord'" (Matt. 23:38,39). Both Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9 tell us about the jar of spikenard that was spread on Jesus head. The betrayal of Judas the Iscariot, including his agreement with the chief priests on the price he would get, is narrated in the four gospels, (Matt. 16:14), (Mark 14:10,11), (Luke 12:3-6) and (John 13:1-3).

## **FIRST HOUR**

The first prophecy is from Moses. “All the congregation of Israel left the wilderness of the Sinai Desert according to God’s commandment. They went to Rephidim. There was no water for them to drink and the people revolted against Moses asking for water... Moses told them: “Why are you blaming me and why tempting God?” And he called the place ‘Massah’ for the chiding of Israel and tempting God when they were asking: “Is the Lord among us or not?” (Ex. 17:1-7).

The children of Israel tempted the Lord, saying “Is the Lord among us or not?”. We leave room for sin when we begin asking if God is among us and begin doubting His presence. The Gospel tells us about the chief priests gathering and consulting to seize the Lord (John 11:46). Had those murderers realized that the Lord was among them, would they do what they did? Would Judas the Iscariot set a price for Jesus, had he known that the Lord was there?

The second Prophecy is from Proverbs 3:5-14. “For the merchandise of wisdom is better than the merchandise of silver and the gain of gold” (Proverbs 3:14). Judas should have reflected on this great piece of wisdom, as he sold Jesus. We too should recall these words when tempted to betray Jesus.

The first lesson of that day is to trust that Jesus is our God, even on the Cross, where He doesn’t have the image of a Savior. He is our Lord even if “there is no beauty that we should desire Him” (Is. 53:2).

## **THIRD HOUR**

The first Prophecy is from Moses. “When Pharaoh let the Israelites go, God did not lead them towards Palestine... but He directed them in the wilderness towards the Red Sea and He walked in front of them in the shape of a column of clouds in daytime, and a column of light in the night showing them the way” (Exodus 13:17).

The story of the crossing of the Israelites is related in the readings of the Sixth hour, the first prophecy is from Exodus 14: “... the angel of God that was walking in front of them, went behind them with the column of clouds entering between the soldiers of the Egyptians and those of Israel”.

God carefully protects His people. As the enemy approaches, He interferes, going between His people and the enemy, in order to save them. In contrast, Man (represented in Judas) interferes between his Savior and the Chief Priests’ forces not as peacemaker, but as a traitor, delivering God and denying His covenant.

The second prophecy is from Joshua 22:7-18. We should be reminded of the Lord’s words about His unfaithful disciple “it were good for that man if he had never been born” (Mark 14:21).

The Third Hour ends with Solomon indicating that the source of evil is in the impure heart (Sirach 20:3-18). This message goes along with the Psalm and Gospel of this hour. Psalm 40:1,6 tells us “I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me, and heard my cry... Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.”

## **SIXTH HOUR**

The Psalm speaks of the conspiracy against the Lord. “They have consulted together with one consent; they are confederate against thee” (Psalm 83:5). The Gospel then condemns the traitor and shows that his betrayal was not an accidental sin. Rather, Judas’ nature was perverse and his behavior originated from his wicked heart. We are reminded of the incident that happened on Saturday when Judas objected to the 300 dinars wasted in the ointment the woman had spread on Jesus feet. Judas suggests that the money could have been given to the poor. He didn’t speak out of compassion but because he was a thief (John 12:1-8).

This same gospel is repeated in the Third Hour of the evening readings, the vigil of Thursday. It is meant to remind us that the disciple delivered his Master. Having opened his heart to evil, Judas committed sin after sin, denying the covenant, stealing the treasure and finally delivering God. He, who sins in one of the commandments, has sinned in all of them. Sin is the leaven that grows in the heart, culminating in the betrayal of the Lord and the denial of faith. May God deliver us from such fall.

## NINTH HOUR

The first Prophecy, from Ex. 24:1-9, tells the story of Isaac's marriage. Abraham sent his servant to choose a wife for Isaac "from his country and his kinsmen". The prophecy reminds us that the Church, Christ's bride, belongs to the bridegroom, Christ. He came in the flesh to choose us as His bride. He says "... they are not from this world as Myself, am not of this world either" (John 17:15). And the second Prophecy from Solomon in Proverbs 1:10 says "My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent." ... continues the reference to Judas.

At the same time that Jesus' disciple was selling Him for thirty pieces of silver, the woman was washing His feet with love. The woman who anointed Jesus' head is the symbol of the soul making amendment to God for the treason of the disciple. We pray that we may wash Jesus' feet with tears of repentance, like the woman cited in the Gospel.

### *Morning:*

- 1<sup>st</sup>: After the people complained to Moses for water, God gave Moses the rod to strike the rock (Exodus); trust God and honor him do not despise His correction (Proverbs); Christ walks openly among the Jews as they plot amongst themselves to kill Him. (John).
- 3<sup>rd</sup>: The Jews escape Pharaoh (Exodus); descriptions of a fool (Sirach); Satan entering into Judas during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Luke)
- 6<sup>th</sup>: Moses escaping from Pharaoh crossing the Red Sea (Exodus); discipline of the mouth (Sirach); fragrant oil
- 9<sup>th</sup>: Abraham blesses Isaac (Genesis), people continue to complain.
- 11<sup>th</sup>: The prophesy in Isaiah speaks of the Lord's promise that His people shall "pass over" the storm (of sin and death). *Homily of St. Severus* emphasizes the Divine Judgment of God that no one can question or avoid. The gospel discusses the distress of the Lord, the burden He begins to endure. He is aware of the death He *must* die for us.

### *Evening:*

- 1<sup>st</sup>: Prophecy of Ezekiel in the inner court (prophecy). Christ explains how He willingly has laid down His life for all, as the commandment He has received from the Father (John). The Crucifixion is not by force, but out of love—that is why the hypocrites could not understand this (exposition).
- 3<sup>rd</sup>: God tells Amos that even when He has blessed His people, they had ignored Him (Amos). **Mary anoints Christ at Bethany** (Mark).
- 6<sup>th</sup>: The Lord declares vengeance upon Tyre after instructing His servants and warning His prophets (Amos). People are unable to fully accept Christ and hardened their hearts because they loved the praise of men more than God and feared exclusion from the synagogue (John).
- 9<sup>th</sup>: These readings again present the amazing contrast between the unbelieving, stubborn, proud Pharisees that attempt to stone Christ; and the patient, wise Savior.
- 11<sup>th</sup>: Finally, Christ explains that He is the Divine Light that separates light from darkness, truth from trickery, wisdom from confusion. But they were still stubborn and did not understand the way of the Lord, as the people explained in the prophesy of Jeremiah.

## HOLY THURSDAY

*Pascha* is the word for "Passover" in all languages. But its meaning lies much deeper than this direct translation. St. Paul describes the life of Christianity as one that passes "*from glory to glory.*" In a similar way, the story of the Passover increases in intensity, meaning, and holiness throughout the ages. There are essentially three Passovers: each the fulfillment of God's promise to save His people, allowing them to pass over from death to life. Each are a symbol of the final forgiveness of sins through the Holy Cross and the Lamb crucified upon its wood. These laws and commandments of the Old Testament were always "*a shadow of the good things to come*" (Hebrews 10:1).

### **The First Passover: Overcoming Temptation and Sin**

The Passover first began with the commandment of the Lord given to Moses, that the blood of the lamb be placed on the door poses of the houses of the Israelites in Egypt. That night, they were to eat bitter herbs, have their loins girded, their sandals on their feet, their staff in their hand (Exodus 12). It continued that through the

shedding of blood of the lamb, there came forgiveness. ***“And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.”*** (Hebrews 9:22).

On the night of their exodus from Egypt, the Lord commanded the Israelites to roast the lamb, and eat unleavened bread with bitter herbs (Exodus 12:8). The meat that the Jews would feast upon was not raw or unbaked, but cooked in fire. The lamb had to suffer through fire; it had to suffer. This meat had a sweet smell, but a bitter taste. Such is the great reminder of sin--however pleasing it may seem to our senses, however alluring it may be to us, we must never forget the bitter sadness of its consequences. This bitterness lies within the cross: ***“He has filled me with bitterness, he has made me drink wormwood”*** (Lamentations 3:15).

The Christian life is full of bitter herbs that bring forth a sweet, saintly aroma. One type of herb comes from loving of our enemies. Another comes from serving the Lord in difficult circumstances—either a family difficulty or a conflict in our schedules. There is a garden of bitter herbs awaiting you in prayer and vigil in times of weakness, sorrow, or confusion. When you fast, you taste of these bitter herbs...you have experienced the Cross. By choosing to take this narrow and difficult path, by submitting to travel along the Via Dolorosa, ***“we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing”*** (2 Corinthians 2:15).

Christ, Himself became the true and ultimate Passover Lamb, the fulfillment of this prophesy. ***“For indeed, Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us”*** (1 Corinthians 5:7). After the disciples had eaten the Passover Meal, the Old Testament had been fulfilled. Our Lord and Savior perfected the Passover meal by offering His Body and Blood in the form of bread and wine. This was the “marriage supper of the Lamb” discussed in Revelation 19:9. This however, was only the first Passover.

### **The Second Passover: Faith and Baptism**

The Second Passover was the crossing of the Red Sea by Moses and the Israelites. Just as Moses had parted its waters and crushed Pharaoh’s soldiers, Christ had destroyed the soldiers of Satan at the bottom of the sea. Moses used his staff; Christ used the cross. They both spread their arms as an eagle, one divided waters between two nations; the Other separated the gap between two worlds.

In our lives, this Passover is the grave importance of baptism. Just as the waters of the Jordan saved the Israelites from the evil army of Pharaoh, so does the baptismal waters save us from Satan’s forces. Once the Jews had crossed the river, they began a new life and were in search of a new home. So too do we begin this Christian Journey through baptism, seeking for eternal rest in Heavenly Jerusalem.

To live this new life in Christ, we cannot seek after the sacramental waters of baptism without faith. An ancient Jewish legend has it that the parting of the Red Sea did not actually take place when Moses had spread his arms, but when the first person took the first step on the water. This legend demonstrates that this miracle was based on the faith that God would fight and work a miracle for His people. We are no longer slaves to doubt, captives of anxiety; we are princes of confidence, kings of faith. As Saint Paul so boldly declared, ***“we walk by faith, not by sight”*** (2 Corinthians 5:7).

### **The Third Passover: The Institution of the Eucharist**

Jesus delegated Peter and John for the preparation of the bread, the wine, the herbs and all that was needed for the celebrations. However, Peter and John didn’t know the place of the Passover. He answered their question by giving them a sign to recognize the house’s owner -- a man carrying a jar of water. Our Savior intentionally did not mention the place at an earlier time, lest Judas would tell the Jews who would keep Him under arrest until the end of the feast. When Peter and John told Jesus that everything was ready, He took His disciples to eat the paschal meal. The disciples argued about who would be the first and last among them. Jesus rebuked them for their evil thinking, saying that the greatest among them should behave as the smallest. Jesus then started washing their feet.

Jesus instituted the Godly Supper, giving us the bread that comes from heaven, the giver of life -- His Holy Body and His Precious Blood. He fulfilled the prophecy, showing them its content. Jesus replaced the first covenant, eating the paschal meal, with a new covenant. “...after supper, He took bread ... and the cup...and gave

it to them saying ‘take, this is my body... this is my blood which is the new covenant... do this in memory of me.’”(John 20).

He told them about Judas’s betrayal, saying “one of you shall deliver me” (John 13:21). Judas who took the bread when he did not deserve it gave Satan power over him. Judas left immediately after being revealed and went to the Jews to agree with them on thirty pieces of silver (Ex. 21:33).

On the same day Jesus foretold Peter about his denying Him three times. He then went to the Garden of Gethsemane where He prayed with such anguish that His sweat turned into blood. An Angel appeared to comfort Him saying: “Yours is the strength, the glory, the blessing and the majesty o Emanuel, our God and King”, which is the only psalm the church keeps repeating the whole Holy Week. Judas arrived with an armed crowd on behalf of the High priests to arrest our Good Savior.

*Morning:*

### **1<sup>st</sup> Hour: The betrayal of Judas**

- *The prayers of the first hour are celebrated in the first section of the church, in the Chorus of Deacons. There, the altar curtain is opened as the church prepares for the Liturgy. After the prophecy from Exodus is read, the readings and prayers follow the basic structure of the Divine Liturgy, with some exceptions.*
- The first prophecy demonstrates the great symbol of the Holy Cross when Moses had lifted up his arms against the Amelikites (Exodus). This is the power and glory of God we proclaim during the Paschal Doxology. Through this prophecy of the Cross, we begin the entry into the Liturgy.
- **Special Hymn: *He who offered Himself***
- **Acts:** Unlike normal liturgy, there are no readings from the Pauline or Catholic Epistles. The first reading is from Acts 1:15-20, regarding the explanation of David’s prophecy concerning Judas. St. Peter explains how the land that Judas bought with the money he denied His Lord was cursed, and how Judas had died on this land, “the field of blood.”
- **Chanting of Judas:** Then, the deacons chant the famous hymn of Judas, while circling the church in the opposite direction. This is to remember that Judas, had broken the law, and acted contrary to the proper Christian way.
- **Trisagion** sung in Paschal tone
- **Psalm.** The prophecy of the Psalm stresses the subtlety of the sin, as well as the extreme moral pain caused to the Lord “...had it been the enemy, I could have endured...” (Ps. 54:10). We are assured that man’s denial does not prevent our salvation. God’s infinite love has overcome all Man’s corruption. The tune of the Psalm is the ‘maluki’, adopted by the church on Tuesday of the holy week for the Psalm when we sing “Your Throne O God”. The same tune will be used again on the Holy Friday at the time of internment. “If You are sold today as a slave O my Lord God... if You entered the grave to untie the bonds of my sin... Your Church and bride You redeemed with Your blood knows Who You are ... You are the King seated on the throne of His glory, holding His reign in His hands”.
- **Gospel.** The gospel explains the preparations of the Passover Meal that Christ tells the disciples. As Christ is preparing for the feast, the Devil is preparing for His death. As the First Passover draws nearer, the Christ, the Lamb is about to be offered and slain.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Hour: Prepare for His Coming**

- *The prayers of the Third, Sixth and Ninth hours are conducted at the second section of the church, as the rest of the Paschal prayers.*
- First prophecy continues with God speaking to the Israelites regarding their stiff necks and unwillingness to accept His commandments.
- The reading of Sirach explains the might and glory of God, dwelling on high and enthroned in majesty through the “tabernacle” in Zion. This is a symbol of His coming into Jerusalem and His High Priesthood.



- The gospel of the third hour again speaks of the preparation of the Passover from the book of Matthew. The 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> hour gospels all speak of this same topic of preparation for the Passover. Each is drawn from the synoptic gospels (Luke, Matthew, Mark, Matthew, respectively). Just as Christ is preparing for the partaking of the Passover, we are preparing for the partaking of communion in the Divine Liturgy.

### **6<sup>th</sup> Hour: Prepare the House**

The Lord is pushing His people to repent. He urges them to help the neighbor, the stranger, the orphan and the widow. The Lord pushes them to prepare *His house*, so that it is not a den of robbers. In the same manner, our God is asking us to prepare our hearts and to respect the sacrament that is being prepared before us (Jeremiah). At the same time, Our Lord Christ explains to the disciples how they shall meet a man (St. Mark the Apostle) who shall show them *the house* where they will eat the Passover meal. This house is the first Church, our Church, which must be prepared for Christ's coming.

### **9<sup>th</sup>: Sacrifice and Salvation; Struggle and Hope**

Again this hour of the Pascha illustrates two great ironies. That salvation must come through sacrifice; and that hope is created through such struggle.

The first prophecy mentions the Story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis. This is an additional symbol of the cross and a father's sacrifice of his son. The prophesy of Isaiah speaks of both the initial punishment that man had as a consequence of sin and the restoration of man through salvation. As a consequence, God has allowed us as priests and ministers, who shall inherit the land a second time. As Origen writes, "Isaac himself carries the wood for his own holocaust: this is a figure of Christ. For He bore the burden of the cross; yet to carry the wood for the holocaust is really the duty of the priest. He is then both victim and priest."

The second theme lies in the hope of man in struggle. The final parable used by Job explains the struggle of man in the world with the will of God. Cast down by pain and trouble, he questions hope in God. This is then compared to the very special Psalm 23, which describes the Lord as our Shepherd who satisfies us from all our needs. He is the Provider of our Souls.

## **LITURGY OF THE BLESSING OF THE WATER OF GREAT THURSDAY**

This is the Paschal Day, the day of 'passage' from slavery under the power of sin, to that of belonging to God under His sovereignty. It is the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt, the land of captivity and the crossing of the Red Sea. This is also the Paschal Day of the Sacred Body and Blood of the New Covenant. The passage is no longer a symbol, as it was when the Hebrews marked their doors with blood to spare themselves from death.

The prayers of the Liturgy of the Blessing of the Water is very similar to the funeral service that is prayed after the Liturgy of the Eucharist on Palm Sunday. However, the meaning and purpose of this liturgy differs. On Palm Sunday, the main purpose of the water is a precautionary measure of the church just in case one member of the church departs during Holy Week. It is a preparation of Holy Week instituted by the church. However, the Laka'an service on Holy Thursday is a specific tradition that follows the example of Christ, who washed the feet of His disciples before Passover. These prayers and readings of this liturgy are also very similar to those of Baptism.

When our Lord began to tell the disciples He would wash their feet, Simon Peter's attitude clearly indicated the temptations that can assail a sincere disciple. The impulsive Peter exaggerates in two opposite senses. First, he does not want Christ to wash him; then, he wants Jesus to wash not only his feet but his head also. We would often like to decide what the Master should do and how He should do it. What Jesus desires is that we let ourselves be directed. This is loving submission to His initiatives even though we do not understand them. If in imitating Jesus you kneel to wash another's feet, it is at this point that the towel with which you wiped them will become for your Veronica's town: on it the Savior's face will be impressed.

When Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, He was purifying their hearts from vanity, teaching them that the greatest should be the least. "Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those

who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so [among] you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.” (Luke 22:24-26). Jesus insisted that Peter let Him wash his feet, lest he should have no share with Jesus (John 13:8). One thing only was now required, that is the washing of the feet, because they were already clean “ But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also.” (John 12:10).

- Prophecies: a series of prophecies are read that indicate the prophecies of the washing and cleansing of God’s peoples. The first two are more in depth, while the latter are more of references. 8 specific prophecies are read, the symbol from Old Testament times of cleansing. On the eighth day children were brought to the temple to be cleansed. This is why the baptismal may have eight sides.
  - (1) Abraham serving the angels of the Lord at Mambre. He washed their feet, and then served them with bread, a calf, butter and milk. This is again a symbol of the coming of Christ, who shall wash the feet of His disciples in humility and servitude before partaking of this great meal.
  - (2) Also, the reading of Solomon regarding the seven pillars of wisdom denote the 7 *sacraments* of the church, as the official declaration that the first sacrament of Holy Week shall begin with the upcoming Divine Liturgy. For this we must have “sound mind.” This passage also symbolizes the divine sacrifice of the New Covenant. Jesus added water to the wine. His side was pierced on the Cross and blood and water came out. The prophecy stresses the importance of the water that washes our dirt and is a symbol of the Holy Spirit.
  - (3) Israelites crossed the Red Sea as a symbol of washing their feet and entering into new land. The crossing of the Red Sea is a symbol of the water of baptism. Sin is being drowned and our salvation is being accomplished. Similarly, the water of the sea saved the people of Israel and drowned Pharaoh and his people. Moses’ rod that separated the waters of the sea is a symbol of the Cross that abolished the bond. “Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with [Him] through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the Cross.” (Col. 2:12-14).
  - (4) Joshua crossed the Jordan river, immersed in water
  - (5) Isaiah explains how this water washes away the filth of our sins.
  - (6) Another passage from Isaiah explains God’s ever-lasting covenant with His people that He will provide for those who follow His ways.
  - (7) Ezekiel’s mentioning that the Lord will “sprinkle” clean water to purge us from all of our dirt and filth caused from our sins.
  - (8) Ezekiel’s vision of a fountain of water flowing as a river from the altar of God into Galilee. This river contained the water of healing that would bring life and salvation to man.
- Homily of St. Shenouda explaining the importance of the water of repentance.
- Pauline Epistle: In explaining the virtues of elders, mothers, and widows, St. Paul emphasizes that if a good widow is one who has took in strangers, tended to the poor, and *washed the feet of the saints*.
- Psalms 50: reading the passage of sprinkling of *hyssop*. Hyssop was used in the Old Testament purification ceremonies. It consisted of lustral water used for aspersion mixed with blood for the purification of lepers. Hyssop branches were used to sprinkle the door-posts with the blood of the Passover Lamb. Thus, as we commemorate the washing of the feet, we remember Christ as the Passover Lamb deeply connected to the hyssop.
- Gospel: Judas departs; Christ girds himself with a towel and washes the disciples’ feet.
- Litanies and Prayers
  - 7 Litanies for the sick, travelers, winds, rulers, departed, oblations, Catechumens.
  - 16 short litanies

- 100 Lord Have Mercy's
- 3 long prayers: Litany of the Peace, of the fathers, of the assemblies,
- Main liturgy: Meet and Right, Cherubim,
- Prayers over the water
- Psalm 150 is chanted by the congregation as the highest ranking priest washes the feet of the other clergy. Then the clergy wash the feet of the congregation.
- Final Prayer and Thanksgiving Prayer
- Homily of St. John Chrysostom

## LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

At this point, the disciples have completed all the preparations needed. The Church has completed the washing of the feet, a symbol of the purification of the people and their readiness to partake in the rich gifts of the Holy Spirit for expiation of sins. It is time now to go to the altar to offer the sacrifice of the New Testament and become part of the true vine in which is the true life.

Following the Liturgy of the Water, we celebrate the Divine Liturgy of the Eucharist. Again, this is the first and only sacrament (outside of Confession) that is celebrated during the Holy Passion Week. The reason we celebrate the liturgy on Thursday is because in the evening, our Lord established the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist after the Last Supper, when He gave His pure Body and precious Blood to His disciples in the form of bread and wine.

- Offering of the Lamb: the lamb is offered, again without any psalms or hymns. As explained earlier, the psalms are not prayed in the traditional way and are substituted by the Paschal prayers. Additionally, the hymn "*Alleluia, this is the day the Lord has made*" (Fai Pe Bi). This hymn is a joyous tune that is chanted only during the annual or festal days of the year, and not during the lenten or paschal days.
- Raising of Incense The priest raises the incense of the Pauline Epistle without the chanting of "*Saved Indeed...*" (Sotees Amen...). This because the church is now focusing on the passion of our Lord, and does not openly proclaim salvation until Resurrection Sunday.
- Pauline Epistle: The Church reads from St. Paul's famous passage of the importance of the Holy Eucharist in Corinthians 11. This is perhaps the one section in all of the Pauline Epistles that directly speaks of how to prepare and partake of the Holy Communion in a worthy and respectful manner.
- *The Catholic Epistle and Acts are not read*
- Litany of the Gospel
- The Psalm and Gospel are read with *annual tone* and not the Paschal tone (of sadness). This annual tune and is read during any liturgy. The only exception throughout the year is on Bright Saturday.
  - Psalm: completes Psalm 23, which began to read in the 9<sup>th</sup> hour. This selected verse discusses how the "Table of the Lord is prepared." This table is the altar before us that is being prepared with Christ's Body and Blood.
  - Gospel reading is taken from the proclamation of Christ that "This is my body...this is my blood."
- Creed is to be recited normally, as explained earlier.
- Prayer of Reconciliation: is *not* prayed because the church has not yet been reconciled through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. Because we are still waiting for the suffering and resurrection, the priest does not recite: "He descended through Hades through the Cross" or "He rose from the dead...", etc.
- Liturgy of the Oblations is then said, without praying the Diptych of the saints or the Commemoration of the Departed. Because we have not celebrated the glory of the Resurrection, the church does not commemorate the resurrection of the departed or the lives of the saints.
- Communion: *Psalm 150 is not chanted. Instead the 11<sup>th</sup> hour prophesies are read.* On Thursday evening, near sunset (near the eleventh hour), Christ ate the Passover meal with the disciples. Afterwards, He

instituted the Eucharist. *Communion should be either before or after sunset, in order for us not to participate at the time that the Jews celebrate Passover at sunset.*

**“With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” (Luke 22:15)**

To which Passover does He refer? The last one which Jesus will celebrate before His death. The one in which He will reveal to His disciples the mystery of the true paschal Lamb. The Paschal meals which He longs to eat with me will enable me to discover the Lamb.

Intense preparation is required for us to partake of this blessed Sacrament. As St. John Chrysostom remarked, “Look, how the people of the Old Testament used to purify themselves to be able to eat the Passover. Moses told them, ‘Anyone who is not pure, who proceeds to eat the Passover, is perished.’ How about the one who proceeds to eat the hidden mystery without preparing himself? If you cannot touch the clothes of an earthly king with impure hands, how dare you proceed to that holy sacrament with a sinful heart and impure conscience?”

### **11<sup>th</sup> Hour: The Beginning of Suffering**

The reading from Isaiah (52:13-53:12) is the fourth and final servant song mentioned in the second part of Isaiah that tells a personal message from the prophet. It is a remarkable passage that explains the suffering he endured, which suggests more clearly than anything in the Old Testament that God accepts one individual’s suffering to atone for the sins of others. This reading becomes an introduction to Christ’s suffering that He would endure for us. It prophesies about the Messiah as the Paschal lamb.

These powerful verses are also used during the Divine Liturgy According to Saint Gregory to explain the great ordeal suffered by our Lord. It begins to predict that the disciples would betray Him, how we leave Him in the midst of our sin. ***All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, very one to his own way*** (53:6).

It prophesies of His silent sorrow amidst the painful beatings. It explains in vivid detail His stripes and bruises. But why such suffering? Why such brutal torment? The Holy Spirit has explained to us hundreds of years before the Crucifixion why.

God had prepared the Israelites with Five different offerings: the burnt offering, the Grain Offering, the Peace Offering, and the Trespass Offering (Leviticus 1-5). This passage of Isaiah connects this Old Testament Law to explain how Christ became the final Offering to represent each of these offerings. On Holy Thursday, we taste each of these offerings.

- (1) **The Burnt Offering** (Leviticus 1) The first offering mentioned was the burnt offering. It required an unblemished lamb offered out of free will. Whether it was of the herd, or of the flocks, or of birds it must be without blemish (Lev. 1:3, 10) Christ had become this pure lamb, and Isaiah tells us that ***no deceit was found in His mouth*** (53:9). He was perfect. The priest would symbolically transfer the sins of the person onto the animal, and kill the animal—teaching us that the punishment of our sins are death. Once a pure creature dies for our behalf, we are saved. But this was an imperfect sacrifice, that was only completed when Christ had come. Although an animal had been offered in the Old Testament, it really required the death of a human being. But because no perfect man had been found, this sacrifice could not be accomplished or accepted. That is why complete atonement was not possible until the coming of Christ. This is the hidden beauty of the Cross.
- (2) **The Grain Offering** (Leviticus 2) This offering was made by baking unleavened cakes of flour, oil, and incense. A part of this was cooked on the fire and offered to the Lord. Christ becomes a symbol of this offering when He offers His Body through Bread. The other offerings are of blood, in which the animal’s blood would be sprinkled around the altar to wash away our sins. But this is the only offering of the Body in the form of bread. In the New Testament, yeast is added to the offering as a representation of the Resurrection.
- (3) **The Peace Offering** (Leviticus 3) This, too, was offered without blemish Christ offered Himself as this Peace offering as well. But this offering was not one of forgiveness or atonement, but was one of thanksgiving and peace. Before Christ breaks the bread, He offers thanksgiving to God and after the meal, He repeatedly blesses His disciples with this peace from on high (John 14:27; 16:6, 22).

- (4) **The Sin Offering** (Leviticus 4) If a person had sinned unintentionally against any of the Lord's commandments (including the anointed priest) he was to bring a special offering to the temple (4:1-3). Again, these animals were all innocent of any sin; they were unblemished.
- (5) **The Trespass Offering** (Leviticus 5) This offering is very similar to the burnt offering and was offered for the atonement of touching any unclean thing or swearing. If he could not bring a lamb, he would bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons (one for burnt offering, and one for a sin offering).

Thus, each sacrifice fulfills the sacrifice of Christ as the Lamb of God (John 1:29) who takes away the sins of the world yet remains sinless. As St. Jacob of Serga said, "the Lamb wanted to eat a lamb with His disciples and take its place and become a Sacrifice instead of all other sacrifices."

The gospel of the 11<sup>th</sup> hour is the only one of the five during the morning prayers that does not concern the preparation of the Passover by the Disciples. It is the special *Laka'an Gospel* and is the only one of the five that is read from the Gospel According to St. John. It speaks of how the Lord, despite all of this suffering, was prepared to offer Himself as this acceptable sacrifice out of His will. He offered willfully, submitting to the Father His life, exactly as the burnt offering must be offered out of free will. (Leviticus 1:3)

### *Evening*

As we approach the crucifixion, the number and intensity of the events steadily increase. This evening's events include the Last Supper, the Eucharist, the Final Message to the Apostles, prayer at Gethsemane, Judas' Betrayal, and the round of trials. In the first hour, we read three gospels from the same evangelist. For the remainder of the Evening of Friday and Great Friday, every hour contains four gospel readings, one from each evangelist.

### **1<sup>st</sup> HOUR: CHRIST SPEAKS WITH US AND PRAYS FOR US**

On Thursday evening, after eating of the Last Supper and the Body and Blood, Christ gives His last Discourse to his people (John 14-17). This passage is so powerful that many Christians in the early church and in the church today have memorized these three chapters. This message is a very special one, for it is only spoken to the disciples and it is only mentioned in the Gospel of John. In plain language, He speaks to them and announces His departure, recalls His ministry full of deeds, words, and miracles. He urges them to keep the commandments and to preserve unity among themselves. And at last, He prays for them.

In the first hour prophesy (Jeremiah 8:17-9:6), the Lord explains how the sins of His people has saddened and perplexed Him. He is to the point of tears. This revelation of His saddened love for us continues throughout the readings of the gospels. The Psalm of the first hour also whispers in our ears the distress of the Lord, where we hear the Lord cry through David the Prophet, "***My enemies have approached me all day long, those who deride me swear an oath against me***" (Psalm 108:8).

Through this wonderful first hour of the evening of Good Friday, the church reads from John 13:33-17:26. This is the only time in the entire year that three gospel readings are read consecutively from the same evangelist! It is perhaps the longest continuous message of Christ mentioned in all of the gospels—even longer than the Sermon on the Mount. For this was not just a sermon, but a private lesson to His disciples. Even more, these passages contain the longest and most personal prayer from Blessed Son to the Heavenly Father. Here, He prays for us personally that we may not fall into sin and that we stay strong in the coming time of trouble and danger. We read the only instance where He refers to Himself as "Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). The final three words of the gospel reading are "***I in them.***" His life for us. His prayer for us. The offering of His Body and Blood on our behalf. Eucharist is intertwined with this one verse. Let us remember this as our focus.

The exposition, as well, is wholly dedicated on this passage, and even begins by repeating part of Christ's prayer for us. Truly, this passage is one of the very special moments of the entire week. May we listen carefully and swim in the sea of His love during these readings.

To prepare us for this message of love, the church adds the words "*The Lord is my Strength, my Praise and has become my Salvation*" to the Paschal hymn "*Thine is the Power*" (*Thok te ti gom*). This is another reminder that the Lord is preparing Himself and us for the Crucifixion.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> HOUR: THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE**

Gethsemane is the Aramaic word for “oil press.” It is a garden east of Jerusalem beyond the Kidron valley and near the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30). Christ often retreated with His disciples in the garden. It was the place where Christ met the Father, where man betrays God.

In the first garden, the Garden of Eden, Adam fell to temptation. But in the Second Garden (of Gethsemane), the Second Adam prevailed over temptation. Such power is only given through prayer and submission to God’s will. The First Adam was cast out of the Garden and kept out by an Angel; God sent an angel to strengthen and comfort the Second Adam (Luke 22:43-44)

“Just as He, in us, became sin although He remained utterly sinless, so we, in Him have become utterly without sin, although we are sinful human beings.” As we chant in the Friday Theotokia of the Holy Psalmody, *“He took what is ours and gave us what is His.”*

As Christ and the disciples did not journey to Gethsemane before “singing a hymn,” so too the Church does not progress without chanting the paschal hymns. Christ had warned the disciples they would betray Him and take offense to Him. Around the same time, Judas plotted with the Jews seeking to capture and kill Christ. In remembrance of such talk, a prophetic psalm is read: ***“They have surrounded me with words of hatred, and fought against me without a cause”*** (Psalm 109: 1, 3). This psalm is the most violent of the “cursing” psalms which explains the cruelty of the Lord’s adversaries.

### **6<sup>th</sup> HOUR: CONTINUOUS PRAYER**

During this hour, Christ asks the disciples to sit with Him and stay awake. He urges them three times to stay awake and pray, for His betrayers are at hand. Through such persistence, the Lord teaches us the importance of vigil in times of trouble.

The Psalm of the hour conjoins two prophetic psalms regarding the betrayal and capture of Christ by His enemies. When King Saul sent men to watch over David in order to kill him, David cries out to the Lord saying, ***“Deliver me from my enemies, O my God; Defend me from those who rise up against me”*** (Psalm 59:1). This verse is part of a long prayer for comfort and deliverance from evildoers. The church reads this psalm as a prayer for the deliverance of God from the hands of these evil men.

### **9<sup>th</sup> HOUR: SEIZING CHRIST**

The first part of the psalm prophesies the nature Judas who spoke in peace and even kissed the Savior, but had evil in his heart to betray his Master (Psalm 28:3,4). In the second, David declares the punishment of those who seek to kill him, ***“Let those bet put to shame and brought to dishonor who seek after my life, let those be turned back and brought to confusion who plot my hurt”*** (Psalm 35:4). A later verse from Psalm 35 is read during the first hour of Good Friday. Thus, Psalm 35 is known as a Passion psalm for it introduces the persecutors who speedily seek destruction.

### **11<sup>th</sup> HOUR: TRIALS BEGIN**

We read during this hour four verses from the messianic Psalm 2. In other orthodox services, this chapter is read during Christmas Eve, as the refrain for one of the hymns; and on Good Friday, where the entire psalm is sung in the First Hour prayers. The exposition of the hour explains further how this psalm is a prophecy that the kings of the earth would condemn Him with false testimony.

## **GOOD FRIDAY**

By far, the one day of the entire church year in which the church prays together is Good Friday. More prayers are prayed, more readings read, more hymns chanted than any other time. All because of the perfect sacrifice; all focused on God and on the Cross.

The prophecies read on this day far outweigh those read throughout any other day of the week. In the first hour, 11 prophecies are read; in the 3<sup>rd</sup> hour, 6 are read and one final prophecy is read in the evening.

## FIRST HOUR

On Friday, Jesus began to be judged in front of a series of councils. The chief priests convened together and condemned the Savior so that they might deliver Him to Pilate to kill him. (Exposition) False witnesses came forth to falsely accuse Him. The “fierce witnesses” mentioned in Psalm 35:11 specifically refers to these false witnesses at the trial of Christ.

The prophecies mostly condemn the priests for this atrocity. Jeremiah says, **“Woe to the shepherds that destroy and scatter the sheep of their pasture!”** The Wisdom of Solomon shows how the Jews will spitefully examine and torture Him. Because of their wickedness, they are blind and will not receive the reward of forgiveness as the rest of the world.

But in each prophesy, the Lord promises to save His people. This one glimmer of hope shined forth through the Cross on this Great Friday. As Micah the prophet proclaims, “for I have fallen yet shall arise; for though I should sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light to me.”

When Judas saw that He was condemned, he brought the **thirty pieces of silver** to the chief priests and elders to avoid the responsibility for innocent blood (Matthew 23:34-35; Deuteronomy 21:9, 27:25). His love of money led to his demise, as explained in the homily of St. John Chrysostom. Ironically, Judas has the same name as Judah, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, who rather than shedding his brother Joseph’s blood, sold him for twenty (or thirty) pieces of silver. (Genesis 37:26-28).

The chief priests took the silver and bought a potter’s field with it to bury strangers in. This itself was the fulfillment of two prophecies (Zechariah 11:12-13; Jeremiah 19:1-13, 32:9). Judas hung himself, unable to acknowledge the forgiveness of God, and unwilling to depend on Christ. Instead of repentance, Judas turned a transgression into another transgression

Then, they had bound Jesus and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate, the governor. A set of charges is presented to Pilate. When Pilate discovers that our Lord was from Galilee, he sent Him to Herod, who questioned and mocked Him. Then the Accused is then returned back to Pilate to without being found guilty. When Christ is returned to Pilate, he tries twice to release Him, even offering a lesser penalty of whipping. Finally, Pilate gives in to the “will” of the Jews. It was a custom to release one of the prisoners at the time of the feast, but the people chose to release Barabbas instead of Jesus. Then Pilate washed his hands in front of them, denying any responsibility for the Innocent One.

At the end of this hour, the Icon of the crucifixion is placed on an icon holder in the chorus of deacons. Candles, lamps, crosses, gospels, and censor(s) and rose petals are placed before the icon of Crucifixion.

## THIRD HOUR: VIA DOLOROSA

The third hour begins the painful torment of Lamb. After Pilate washes his hands, the soldiers took Him into the common hall, paraded around Him, stripped Him and divided his garments. All of this was prophesied about in Psalm 22:17, **“They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.”** They dressed Him in a scarlet robe, platted a crown of thorns, and placed a reed in His hand.

**“He was wounded for our transgressions., He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all”** (Isaiah 5:6).

This is the day of pain, the day of sorrows. It is the commandment for us, **“not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake”** (Philippians 1:29). By actively participating in the Holy Passion Week, through fasting, prayer and repentance we suffer for His sake. Suffering is a gift from God, so that we can experience His satisfaction and capture the quiet endurance of the saints. Through meditation of the Cross, we witness His Divine Love for us. **“Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”**

*My Lord and Savior, Your body is torn by whips and I wear nice clothes, living lavishly and carelessly. You are given the myrrh to drink, and I enjoy the desires of life. You comfort my pains and sufferings and I refuse to repent. I ask You to have mercy upon me, for I know how tender is Your overflowing mercy.*

Because of us, we who have been uncovered because of sin, the God of Glory, Jesus, was stripped of His clothes, was tied to the post, and was whipped with ropes and rods in which there was a chain of bones...Until this innocent body is scattered and its flesh dispersed in compensation; and His blood is shed to protect our wounds and to cure them. May we praise Him, for it is He who has killed death by death with His crown of thorns! (St. Ephram the Syrian)

This day of sufferings for God is at the same time a day of rejoicing for all humankind, who obtained Salvation through the Cross, achieving what was unthinkable -- Salvation and eternal life at the price of Jesus' blood. "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined [to be] conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." (Rom. 8:29).

The sign of the Cross appears for the first time in Genesis 48:1-9. When Joseph presented his two sons, Ephraim and Manassah to be blessed by his father Jacob, Joseph placed Ephraim on the left side of Jacob, and Manassah on his right side. Jacob put his right hand on Ephraim, although he was the youngest, and his left hand on Manassah, thus crossing his hands. Joseph protested telling his father that his right hand should be on the eldest but Jacob replied: "I know my son, I know."

All the prophecies that are read during the Third Hour describe Jesus' sufferings in words similar to the words used in the Gospels.

The Prophecy	The New Testament
I did not defend myself, but offered my back to be lashed	Jesus was delivered to be lashed (Mark 15:15)
and my cheeks to be slapped	and they slapped Him (John 19:3)
and I did not turn my face away from the shame of the spitting (Is. 50:4-9).	and they were spitting at His face (Mark 15:9).
They conspired between them-selves saying: let us tie the innocent (Is. 3:9-15)	They tied Him and took Him (Matt. 27:2).

### SIXTH HOUR: THE CRUCIFIXION

There is only one theme for this entire hour: the Cross. The first prophecy introduces the Moses' the brazen serpent—a symbol of the powerful cross crushing Satan and all death. We remember the events of this hour each day throughout the year during the Agpeya prayers of the sixth hour.

The second prophecy is a powerful sign of Christ as the Lamb, brought to the slaughter. In the Jewish times, the lambs that were used for the temple sacrifices were born in Nazareth, grazed throughout Jerusalem, and then slaughtered on Golgotha outside of the temple. This practice becomes an amazing foreshadow of Christ, the true and perfect Lamb of God. Isaiah 53 is one of the most powerful selections read in the entire week. It tells of the crucifixion, the burial, and the inheritance of salvation in a deeply prophetic manner.

Following these great prophecies, the Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians is read. Its simple and essential theme: *Glory in the Cross*. Afterwards, six litanies are said by the priest, along with responses from the congregation. These prayers are patterned after those that follow the gospel readings in the Agpeya prayers.

Following this, the hymn of Omonogenis (O Only Begotten) is chanted. The initial part of the hymn discuss the incarnation and crucifixion, and is accompanied by a somber paschal tune. Yet, near the end, there is a glimpse of hope when discussing the promise of the resurrection. Once the congregation chants "tramped down death..." (Thanato Thanaton...), the hymn regains life in a lively tempo and lighter beat. The Trisagion (Agios) is then chanted twice, in two separate tunes.



When Christ breathed His last, darkness came over all the land from the sixth to the ninth hour. The church recreates this eclipse by turning off all of the lights in the church after this one verse is read.

After the reading of the exposition, which sufficiently memorializes the events of this distressing hour, the church chants the hymn *Ari pa mevi* (Remember Me). This hymn is based on the words spoken by Didymus, the Thief on the Right. This hymn has 11 verses said by the reader, followed by repetitions of the thief's petition.

This Hour is one of rejoicing for all the humankind, from the Prophets of the Old Testament to the believers who recognized the Cross of our Lord in the New testament. St. Paul says "I pride myself only in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14). The Cross is a crown of victory. It has brought light to those blinded by ignorance. It has released those enslaved by sin. Indeed, it has redeemed the whole of mankind. Do not, then be ashamed of the Cross of Christ; rather, glory in it. Although it is a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles, the message of the Cross is our salvation. Of course, it is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it was not a mere man who died for us, but the Son of God, God made man. (St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

### **NINTH HOUR: DEATH**

"O Thou Who surrendered Your soul into the hands of the Father when Thou were crucified on the Cross on the Ninth hour and lead the thief into Paradise, do not forsake me." After He tasted the vinegar, Jesus said, "All is accomplished", then He inclined His head and commended His soul to the Father (John 19:30). Then Jesus cried out loudly "O Father, in Thine hands I surrender my soul" (Luke 23:46) and (Matt. 27:46).

At the Cross, the Church contemplates the great love manifest on the Cross while our Savior went through the unknown, the terror of humankind -- death. How blessed is this unique moment of death! It is the moment the devil was terrified and tied, the moment those who had slept in hope rejoiced. The dead were considered dead in their bodies, but their souls considered alive in God. (II Peter 4:6). This is also the moment the thief entered Paradise, opening the door to the humankind. Once our Savior had gone through the terror of death, this terror vanished. No longer would those who die in Christ, be enslaved by death.

The first prophesy is from Jeremiah 11:18. "Like a perfect lamb taken to be slaughtered...they conspired against me saying: 'let us eradicate him from the living beings'". How could they think, O our Lord and God, of suppressing from life the Origin and Giver of life! From now on, death has acquired a new meaning: death in Jesus Christ, being Life and eternal life.

The next prophesy is from Zechariah 14: "On that day, living waters will flow Jerusalem...and God shall be King over the whole world." Even, though His death on the Cross was real, He remains alive as we chant with the Angels: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal". The Spirit that inspired this prophesy reveals how far the outreach of His Kingdom, like the overflowing waters from Jerusalem for all who come to drink, be it the Jews or the nations. God shall be King over the whole world.

*The spear* has supposedly entered from the right side, diagonally, ending in the heart. This was a prophesy mentioned in the Psalms: "My heart is wounded" (literally, pierced) (Psalm 109:21, 22). The soldier who thrust this spear was named Longinus. After witnessing this majestic event, he confessed Christianity and became himself a martyr.

During the 9<sup>th</sup> hour, candles are lit before the Icon of the Crucifixion. The presbyters, with their heads uncovered and wearing their liturgical robes, cense the icon. In the presence of the bishop, they cense and bow before him without kissing his hand nor the cross.

### **ELEVENTH HOUR: TAKING DOWN FROM THE CROSS**

At this hour, the Scriptures have been fulfilled as our Savior had said (John 19:30). Moses struck the rock in the desert, and water poured out that saved the life of the people of Israel. When the soldier pierced the side of our Savior on the Cross, blood and water came out. It is now up to us to satisfy our thirst from the waters of life.

The prophecy from Exodus 12:1-14 gives the details of God's order to the sons of Israel. They were to immolate the lamb and put marks of his blood on their threshold and doors... no bones were to be broken. The blood was a sign to be recognized by the angel of death to spare them from death. We find the same words in John, when the soldiers came to Him "they did not break His legs" (John 19:23) as was their habit. From His pierced side, came out "blood and water" (John 19: 33, 34). The water is the symbol of humility, peace and love, the fruits of the Holy Spirit through the waters of the baptism. The blood of Jesus will dye our hearts as a recognizable sign of our salvation when we share the Cross with Him.

### **TWELFTH HOUR: BURIAL**

Although the Lord Christ was taken off of the Cross during the Eleventh Hour and although the rest of the Pascha days all include an eleventh hour, Good Friday ends with the Twelfth Hour. We again remember the events of this hour each day throughout the year during the Agpeya prayers of the twelfth hour.

The Romans' conduct was to leave the crucified bodies on the crosses for the birds to prey. The Jewish people used to throw the bodies in a pit where garbage and sewerage were to be burnt. Joseph of Arimathea requested Pilate to let him take Jesus' holy body. Nicodemus, who disagreed with the Assembly on their condemnation of Jesus (John 7: 50-52), helped Joseph for the inhumation with perfumes and pure linen, as predicted by Isaiah.

The Prophecy for the twelfth hour comes from the Lamentations of Jeremiah on the sufferings of the Cross and of the grave are depicted. The Gospels show us the similarity between Jesus and Jonah. Like the prophet Jonah remained inside the whale three days and three nights, "the Son of Man shall be inside the earth for three days and three nights" (Matthew 12:40). A psalm of praise follows the Gospel. "Your throne O God is for ever and ever".

The priest covers the icon with a white linen cloth and places the cross over it. He then covers them with rose petals and spices, and places two candles on each side of it—representing the two angels at the tomb of Christ. The priests, according to their ranks, start reading the Psalms 1, 2, and 3 until they reach "***I lay down and slept***" (Psalm 3:5). Then the curtain of the altar is closed and the 150 psalms are read in their entirety.

The sufferings of our Lord are the price of our salvation for which we are rejoicing. No words can be spoken! We contemplate Your sufferings and Your pierced side while we stand at the Cross, the source of our rejoicing.

### **BRIGHT SATURDAY**

Passover is a joyful celebration, from which we pass over from death to life, from sin to holiness, from Hades to Paradise. The glorious Church provides us with the same path from Good Friday to Easter through Apocalypse Saturday. This is also called "Bright Saturday" where the church is dressed in white, and filled with joyful hymns. We can hardly imagine what Eternity and the eternal life can be like. The answer is given to us this night when the Church takes us to heaven! Only those of us who have experienced this night in the church and attended the prayers can tell about their indescribable happy experience. This is the night of the passage from death to life. Joyful tunes replace the sad ones. Each tune starts sadly, then in the middle of it, becomes joyful, as we pass from death to life.

After crossing the sea, the Israelites began to sing the song of praise, victory, and salvation (Exodus 15). This is a wonderful example of how joyous life in Christ truly is. Though we face many problems and circumstances beyond our control, though there may be great tribulation, controversy or turmoil, we continue to shout to the Lord in thanksgiving and praise. This is the profession and vocation of a true Christian.

Thus far, the church has read through the entire book of Isaiah, the Psalms, and most of the other prophecies and gospels. During this festival of joy, the church continues in its prayerful meditations by reading the praises from the Old Testament—spanning the entire breadth of the Bible, from the Historical Books (Exodus), the Prophetic Books (Isaiah, Samuel, Daniel, Habakkuk, Baruch) the poetical books (Lamentations, Job) and the Deuterocanonical books .

- The first praise is from the first part of Moses, the crossing of the Red Sea from death to life. (Exodus 15).
- The prayer of Anna, mother of Samuel, is also read (I Sam. 2:1-11). “By God alone, one is made dead or alive...fallen in an abyss or lifted above.”
- Habakkuk 3:2-19 expresses his exuberance in God his Savior, “He raises me up above... that my victory is in His praise.”
- Jonah’s prayer, Jonah 2:2-10, is also read. “In my tribulations, I cried to the Lord my God. He heard my voice from the abyss of hell”(Jonah 2:2). Jonah came out alive from the whale.
- We also read from Isaiah 28:10-20. Ezekiel, the Prophet and King of Judah, prayed to God and “God heard him and gave him fifteen years to live after the presumed date of his death.”
- The three young men who were thrown in the fire crossed from death to life, because Christ was there with them.
- Susanna, the chaste woman was condemned to death, but God saved her.

As we see, all the prayers and rites are praises for the passage from death to life. The Church introduces us to life in Heaven. A number of processions are alternated between the praises. The priests and the deacons turn around the altar, holding crosses and icons with lit candles. The atmosphere is one of joy and delight that can be experienced only by those who have attended the rites. The feeling is that of crossing from the world’s life of misery to the heavenly life.

The Church is leading us to the joy of the Resurrection and its aftermath. At dawn the readings are from the Book of Revelation. The priests, deacons and the community surround seven oil lamps, representing the seven spirits that are before the Throne (Rev. 1:4), the seven lit fires (Rev. 5:4) that are the seven Angels standing before God.

They are also the seven golden tribunes (Rev. 1:12) and the seven planets He holds in His hands (Rev. 1:16). The seven planets are the angels (bishops) of the seven churches and the planets. The seven tribunes are the seven churches (Rev. 1:20). We read the Book of Revelation, a book that unveils the secrets of the aftermath of the resurrection.

There is no end to what can be said about this night. It is indeed a personal experience that cannot be described. No one can express the meaning of this night unless he shares in the readings and praises. “To him that comes victorious, I’ll have him seated with Me on My throne as I have been victorious Myself and am seated with My Father on His throne. Let him who has ears listen to what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev. 3:21,22).

*St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church  
of Washington, DC*



*11911 Braddock Road*

*Fairfax, VA 22030*

*Tel: (703)591-4444 Fax: (703)591-3030*

*[www.stmarkdc.org](http://www.stmarkdc.org)*

*[info@stmarkdc.org](mailto:info@stmarkdc.org)*