JOURNEY TO PASCHA

A DAILY GUIDE THROUGH HOLY WEEK

"Christ is risen from the dead, by death He has trampled down death, and to those in the tombs He has bestowed life."

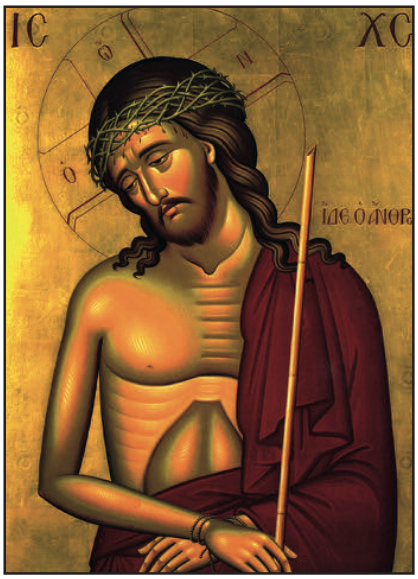
— Apolytikion for Pascha (Plagal of the First Tone)

THE SERVICES OF HOLY WEEK

The services of Holy Week transform us into eyewitnesses and direct participants in the awesome events of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In readings taken from both Old and New Testaments, in hymns, processions, and liturgical commemoration, we see the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies, and the mighty acts by which God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, grants us forgiveness for our sins, and rescues us from the pain of eternal death.

THE SERVICES OF HOLY WEEK



Icon of "The Bridegroom"

PALM SUNDAY EVENING

This evening's service calls to mind the beginning of Jesus' suffering. The Gospel describes the plotting of the priests and elders to trap Jesus into convicting Himself as a religious heretic. Through parables, Jesus tells us of His coming betrayal, trial, conviction and execution by crucifixion. The hymns of this service commemorate two things: The first, the prophetic figure of Joseph, who, while virtuous, nonetheless suffered unjustly at the hands of his brothers before being greatly rewarded; and the second, the parable of the fig tree, which in failing to bear fruit, became a symbol of fallen creation, and of our own lives, in which we also have failed to bear spiritual fruit. Scripture readings for this service are taken from: Matthew 21:18-43.

HOLY MONDAY EVENING

This evening's theme is the need for watchfulness and preparation, lest we be called unprepared before the awesome judgement seat of Christ to render an account of ourselves. The gospel reading contrasts the efforts of the Pharisees to trick and discredit Jesus with the forceful resistance which Christ mounts against their evil. The hymns remind us of the parable of the Ten Virgins, in which the faithful Christian is exhorted to vigilance. Scripture readings for this service are taken from: Matthew 22:15-46; 23:1-39.

HOLY TUESDAY EVENING

The need for true repentance is the concern of Tuesday evening's service. This transformation from the life of sin to a life of faith and obedience is exemplified for us in the person of the sinful woman who received the gift of forgiveness when she anointed Jesus with myrrh and washed His feet. The highlight of this service is the hymn written in honor of this woman by St. Kassiani. The Gospel meditation foretells of the coming suffering of Christ and recalls His inner struggles and agony. Scripture readings for this service are taken from: John 12:17-50.

THE SERVICES OF HOLY WEEK

HOLY WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON/EVENING

The primary theme of Holy Wednesday is our human need for the healing and forgiveness that comes into our lives when we establish a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We are reminded that the way to this relationship is to be found, above all else, through the life of prayer. In the Sacrament of Holy Unction, the faithful are anointed and thus, healed both physically and spiritually. They are also reconciled to God and one another so that they might receive the gift of the Holy Eucharist instituted by Christ at the Last Supper.

Scripture readings for this service are taken from: Epistle readings: James 5:10-16, Romans 15:1-7, I Corinthians 12:27-31-13:1-8, II Corinthians 1:8-11. Galatians 5:22-6:2, I Thessalonians 5:14-23. Gospel readings: Luke 10:25-37, Luke 19:1-10, Matthew 10:1 & 10:5-8, Matthew 8:14-23, Matthew 25:1-13, Matthew 15:21-28, and Matthew 9:9-13.

THE PRAYER OF ANOINTING

O Holy Father, Physician of souls and bodies, Who didst send Thine only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to heal every infirmity and deliver from death: Heal Thou, also, Thy servants from the ills of the body and soul which do hinder them, and quicken them, by the Grace of Thy Christ; through the prayers of our most Holy Lady, the Birth-Giver of God and Ever Virgin Mary; through the intercession of the honorable bodiless Powers of Heaven; through the power of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross; through the protection of the honorable, glorious, Prophet and Forerunner John the Baptist; of the holy, glorious and righteous Martyrs; of our righteous and Godbearing Fathers; of the holy and healing unmercenaries Cosmas and Damian, Cyrus and John, Thaleleus and Tryfon, Panteleimon and Hermolaus, Samson and Diomidis, Mokius and Aniketos; of the holy and righteous ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna; and of all the Saints. For Thou art the Fountain of healing, O God, our God, and unto Thee do we ascribe glory, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

THE SERVICES OF HOLY WEEK

The icon of the "Last Supper"

HOLY THURSDAY MORNING

"On the night when He was betrayed, or rather when He gave Himself up for the life of the world, He took bread in His holy, pure, and blameless hands, gave thanks, blessed, sanctified, broke, and gave it to His holy disciples and apostles saying..."

— Taken from the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

On Holy Thursday morning, we ascend Mt. Zion with Christ and the Twelve, and enter into the upper room. Once there, we witness the awesome moment when, at the Last Supper, Christ abolishes the ritual practice of the Old Covenant and establishes the ritual of the New Covenant, prophesied by Jeremiah, through the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The faithful receive Holy Communion at that Holiest of Liturgies. Scripture readings for this service are taken from: Matthew 26:2-20, John 13:3-17, Matthew 26:21-39, Luke 22:43-45, and Matthew 26:40-27:2.

ICON OF THE LAST SUPPER

Christ is the central figure at the table. Saint John the Beloved [Evangelist, Theologian] is seated at Christ's right; as the youngest of the disciples he is depicted as beardless. Judas Iscariot the Betrayer is the fifth figure from Christ's right; he is depicted dipping into the dish (Matthew 26:20-25).

THE SERVICES OF HOLY WEEK

The icon of "The Crucifixion"

HOLY THURSDAY EVENING

In this service, we commemorate the undeserved suffering of Jesus Christ, endured for our sake, so that we might be reconciled anew to God our Father. The Gospel readings witness for us the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, his trial and conviction, and finally his torture, crucifixion and death at the hands of a sinful humanity. This evening's service also includes the procession representing Christ carrying His own cross along the Via Dolorosa, and ends when we see before us the King of Glory crucified. Scripture readings for this service are taken from:

1. John 13:31-18:1
2. John 18:1-29
3. Matthew 26:57-75
4. John 18:28-19:16
5. Matthew 27:3-32*
6. Mark 15:16-32
7. Matthew 27:33-54
8. 23:32-49
9. John 19:25-37
10. Mark 15:43-47
11. John 19:38-42
12. Matthew 27:62-66

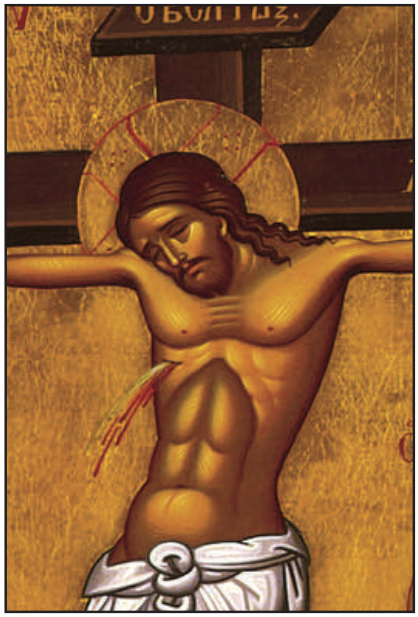
THE SERVICES OF HOLY WEEK

*After the reading of the fifth Gospel comes the procession with the Crucifix around the church, while the priest chants the Fifteenth Antiphon:

"Today is hung upon the Tree, He Who did hang the land in the midst of the waters. A Crown of thorns crowns Him Who is King of Angels. He is wrapped about with the purple of mockery Who wrapped the Heavens with clouds. He received buffetings Who freed Adam in Jordan. He was transfixed with nails Who is the Bridegroom of the Church. He was pierced with a spear Who is the Son of the Virgin. We worship Thy Passion, O Christ. Show also unto us thy glorious Resurrection."

ICON OF OF THE CRUCIFIXION

The icon of the Crucifixion depicts Christ nailed to the Cross. His right side is pierced and from the wound flows blood and water. At the foot of the Cross is a skull. Golgotha, the Mount on which Christ was crucified, means "the place of the skull". Tradition related that the Cross of Christ stood directly over the grave of our forefather Adam. On the top bar of the Cross is the inscription "I.N.B.I.", the initials for the Greek words meaning "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." To the left of Christ, the Theotokos and St. Mary Magdalene are often pictured as well; the youthful St. John the Beloved Disciple and St. Longinus the Centurion (Mark 15:39) are shown to the right if they are depicted.



Icon of "The Crucifixion", detail.

In addition to this icon, Orthodox churches process with and display a large wooden Crucifix with an image of Christ attached. At the Vespers on Friday, the image of Christ is removed from the Cross and wrapped in a new white cloth. Another icon, one that depicts the body of Christ removed from the Cross, appears on the *Epitaphios* that is carried and placed in the Tomb during this service.

THE SERVICES OF HOLY WEEK

HOLY FRIDAY AFTERNOON

In this service, we are once again reverent witnesses to the undeserved suffering of Christ, to his terrible passion and death. What is remembered in a special way through liturgical commemoration and procession, is the faithfulness and love of Joseph of Arimathea who tenderly removed Christ's body from the cross, wrapped it in clean linen, and carried it to his own unused tomb for burial. Scripture readings for this service are taken from: I Corinthians 1:18-2:2, Matthew 27:1-38, Luke 23:39-43, Matthew 27:39-54, John 19:31-37, and Matthew 27:55-61.

The icon of "The Apokathilosis"

During the Holy Friday afternoon service, the priest removes Christ from the Cross and wraps Him in a white cloth.

ORTHODOX CELEBRATION OF GREAT AND HOLY FRIDAY

As the priest proclaims the Gospel, "And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb..." he removes the Body of Christ from the Cross, wraps it in a new white cloth and takes it to the altar. The priest then chants the hymn: "When Joseph of Arimathea took You, the Life of all, now dead, down from the Cross, he buried You in fine linen, after anointing You with myrrh. He yearned with desire, humbly contained by awe, rejoicing, he cried out to You: Glory to Your condescension, O merciful God!". The priest then carries the *Epitaphios*, the cloth on which the Body of Christ is painted or embroidered, around the church before placing it inside the Sepulcher, a carved bier which symbolizes the Tomb of Christ.

The icon of "The Epitaphios Thrinos" (Lamentation at the tomb)

HOLY FRIDAY EVENING

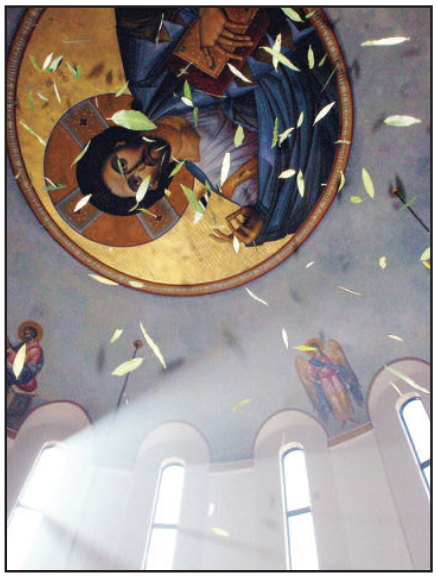
On Holy Friday evening, the theme is Christ's descent into Hades during which the Gospel of repentance and reconciliation with God is shared with those who died before Christ's saving dispensation in the flesh. The service begins with lamentations sung as we stand before the tomb of Christ commemorating His unjust punishment and the shedding of His innocent blood. But the service ends on a note of joy and hope, with the reading of the Prophet Ezekiel in which he describes his vision of our resurrection yet to come; in the midst of despair, we are told there is hope, for not even death can separate us from the unfailing love and power of God. Death is about to be conquered and faithfulness rewarded. Scripture readings for this service are taken from: Ezekiel 37:1-14, I Corinthians 5:6-8, Galatians 3:13-14, Matthew 27:62-66.

ORTHODOX CELEBRATION OF HOLY FRIDAY EVENING

At the Third Stasis when the verse Ἔρραναν τον Ταφον, αι μυροφοροι μυρα, λιαν πρωι ελθουσαι/*The myrrh-bearing women came very early in the morning and sprinkled the tomb with myrrh"* is sung the priest sprinkles the *Epitaphios* with rosewater, using the *rantistirion* (sprinkler). This verse is usually repeated three or more times. It has become the custom to sprinkle the people as well.

The priest sprinkles the Epitaphios with rosewater.

THE SERVICES OF HOLY WEEK



After the reading of the Epistle on Holy Saturday morning, the priest follows the custom of tossing laurel, saying: "Arise, O God, and judge the earth; for You shall take all nations to Your inheritance".

HOLY SATURDAY MORNING

On Holy Saturday morning we celebrate the theme of faithfulness receiving its reward. The crucifixion is over, Christ is buried, the twelve apostles and other disciples are scattered and defeated. And yet, three myrrh-bearing women come in faithfulness to perform the last act of love—to anoint Jesus according to the Jewish burial custom. Their unwavering devotion is rewarded—they are the first to share in Christ's triumph over evil and death. They are the first witnesses to the Resurrection. This joy is commemorated through the scattering of bay leaves and rose petals by the priest. Scripture readings for this service are taken from: Romans 6:3-11 and Matthew 28:1-20.

HOLY SATURDAY EVENING/ EASTER SUNDAY MORNING

Icon of "The Descent Into Hades"

The lamentations of the previous night are repeated and the church is plunged into darkness to symbolize the despair and defeat experienced before the dawn of Christ's victory over the Enemy of our salvation. Precisely at midnight, a single light emerges from the altar representing the victory of Christ over death, the defeat of the Prince of Darkness by Jesus, the Light of the World. As the light is passed from person to person, it pushes back the darkness of the church and defeats it completely. The Resurrection is proclaimed in song and triumphant procession, and after the Liturgy, its light is carried into our homes so that they too might be filled with its light and warmth and triumph. Scripture readings for this service are taken from: Mark 16:1-8.

THE SERVICES OF HOLY WEEK

Icon of "The Myrrh-Bearing Women"

EASTER SUNDAY MORNING

Christ's Resurrection and victory is affirmed in this morning's theme. The Gospel is read in several languages to illustrate the universality of the Good News of the Resurrection and its proclamation to the very ends of the earth. Love, forgiveness, reconciliation, triumph and joy—these are the gifts which we receive because Christ lived and died and triumphed for our sake. Scripture readings for this service are taken from: John 20:19-25.

ORTHODOX CELEBRATION OF PASCHA

During the forty days of the Resurrection period, Orthodox Christians greet one another by saying: "Christ is Risen", the Easter salutation. They likewise respond with the affirmation: "Truly He is Risen!"

The Gospel according to John (20:19-25) is read in various languages, proclaiming the Good News of the Resurrection all over the universe without discrimination. The fruit of faith in the Resurrection of the Lord is love in His Name; therefore, this day is called "Sunday of Agape" (love feast), a day dedicated to Christian principles, especially to forgiveness and charity. At this time, Christians seek to end misunderstanding and arguments among those with whom they may be at odds.

GLORY BE TO HIM FOR ALL THINGS,
AND MAY YOUR EASTER BE BLESSED

GREEK ORTHODOX
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

Text taken from the "Holy Week Meditation and Study Guide"
which was generously provided by Rev. Father Andrew J. Demotses

Additional texts on the "Orthodox Celebration of Great and Holy Friday",
the "Orthodox Celebration of Pascha", and the "Icon of the Crucifixion"
compiled by Rev. Father Nektarios Morrow.

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