

The Confessor's Tongue for April 9, A. D. 2017

Sunday of the Entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday)

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

Holy Week Notes

During Holy Week, we accompany Christ to His Passion and death. We stand in awe before the sight of the eternal Son of God who made the world being rejected, condemned, mistreated, and put to death by His own creature. At this time more than any other during the year, we contemplate what Christ our God has done for us. Thus, all the faithful are strongly encouraged to make the services of Holy Week their priority out of love and respect for the One who gave His life for each of them.

The lenten melodies and the Prayer of St. Ephrem are used through the last Presanctified Liturgy of the week, on Holy Wednesday.

At Matins, candles are placed unlit in the candlestands before the service. They will be lit during the Alleluia after the Great Litany. Prostrations are made during Matins at the Troparion "Behold, the Bridegroom comes at midnight," the Exapostilarion "Thy bridal chamber I see adorned..." at the Prayer of St. Ephrem, and during the First Hour when the Priest comes out after the psalms for the troparion of the hour and again during the prayer of St. Ephrem.

Holy Week is the most solemn week of the entire year, celebrating the events of our salvation. The Holy Services should be our primary task each day. Children should be regular participants. A blessed silence should reign in our homes with no television or radio, etc. Lipstick should not be worn when venerating holy objects: Cross, Winding-sheet, Chalice, Icons.

Gospel Reading During Holy Week

During Holy Week on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday at the reading of the Hours (3rd, 6th, 9th—the First Hour is read attached to the end of Matins the night before) in the morning, there is a custom of reading through all four Gospels except John 13:33-21. Matthew is read in two parts: at the Third and Sixth Hours on Monday, Mark is read in two parts: at the Ninth Hour on Monday and at the Third Hour on Tuesday; Luke is read in three parts: at the Sixth and Ninth Hours Tuesday and at the Third Hour Wednesday; John is read in two parts up through 13:32: at the Sixth and Ninth Hours of Wednesday.

There were a couple years in the past when we attempted to do some of this, but it was difficult. It is a good thing in a week full of good things, but it was but lightly attended and was a strain on the priest's voice.

We shall not attempt it this year in the church, but it may be something you may like to attempt at home, to read all four Gospels, or even just one, as a family together each taking turns, or alone. To read or hear all four Gospels or one in its entirety this week

will heighten your experience of Holy Week and Pascha.

The texts for the Hours are on our website under "Orthodox Prayers". The Gospels are read after the Theotokion at each hour.

Holy Week Needs

You may volunteer or be recruited for these (and other) tasks!

1. Clean & decorate church on Holy Friday.
2. Boil and dye eggs for Paschal Vigil (we need 10 dozen at least—Melanie Betz overseeing).
3. Roast the lamb at church Pascha morning (from 900 a.m. or so) and cut it up when done to eat at the picnic (young men: Terry, Jeremy, Ian)
4. People to read the Paschal Gospel from John chapter 1 (1:1-17, but this year we shall read 1:1-5, 11-14) in various languages at the paschal liturgy.
5. Prepare egg hunt for children (candy into eggs).
6. Remove tomb during the Paschal procession, light all candles, reposition flowers.
7. Greet at Paschal Vigil, sell processional candles, and help guests.
8. Men and boys for processions on Holy Friday (to carry cross, winding sheet, etc.) and Pascha night.
9. Put out lights to mark the procession path.
10. Keep the Grave Watch Friday afternoon through Saturday night
11. Bake Artos (Elisabeth Terry)
12. Make Cheese Pascha.
13. Learn Paschal Greetings (all)

Paschal Greetings in Various Languages

A chance to ahead of time. Be ready for any of them.

Greek: Christos anesti! Alethos anesti!

Russian: Khristos voskresye! Vo istinu voskresye!

Arabic: El Messieh kahm! Hakken kahm!

Serbian: Cristos vaskres! Vaistinu vaskres!

German: Christus ist auferstanden! Wahrlich er ist erstanden!

Latin: Christus resurrexit! Vere resurrexit!

Japanese: Christos fukkatsu! Jitsu ni fukkatsu!

French: Le Christ est ressuscité! En vérité il est ressuscité!

Norwegian: Kristus er oppstanden! Han er sannelig oppstanden!

Italian: Cristo e' risorto! Veramente e' risorto!

Eritrean-Tigre: Christos tensiou! Bahake tensiou!

Swahili: Kristo amefufukka! Kweli Amefufukka!

Georgian: Kriste aghsda! Cheshdmaritad aghsda!

Finnish: Kristus nousi kuolleista! Totistesti nousi!

Zulu: Ukristu uvukile! Uvukile kuphela!

Welsh: Atgyfododd Crist! Atgyfododd in wir!

Gaelic: Taw creest eeren! Taw shay eeren guhdyne!

Anglo-Saxon: Crist aras! Crist sodhlice aras!

Chinese: Helisituosi fuhuole! Qeshi fuhuole!

Coptic: Pchristos aftooun! Alethos aftooun!

Alut: Khristusax agla-gikux! Agangu-lakan agla-gikux!

Holy Friday Fast

The Typicon calls for a total Fast on Holy Friday, not eating or drinking at all in honor of Christ's death because of our sins. Strictly, this fast would not be broken until after the Liturgy on Holy Saturday. Those who cannot go that long are permitted to eat and drink after the Burial Vespers Friday afternoon.

Until two years ago, we put food out during the session of church cleaning and decorating on Holy Friday morning. Your priest has never been comfortable with that, and decided two years ago that the time had come for us to strengthen our observance of Holy Friday. As we do not put out meat and dairy at church functions during the fasts, neither should we put out food on Holy Friday. We may feed our children as needed, even during the work time at church, but I would ask that adults not put out food for general consumption. Water, coffee, and tea are blessed for partaking of, and we'll make coffee (don't think most of us are ready for abstaining from liquids all day; those who so desire are welcome to try), but those adults who cannot or will not observe the Holy Friday Fast are asked to eat before they come or after they leave so that we may all properly and lovingly support one another in the fast on the day of the Lord's death for us.

On Knowing One's Weakness

St. Isaac the Syrian, From Homily 8

Blessed is the man who knows his own weakness, because this knowledge becomes to him the foundation, the root, and the beginning of all goodness. For whenever a man learns and truly perceives his own weakness, at that moment he contracts his soul on every side from the laxity that dims knowledge, and he treasures up watchfulness in himself. But no one can perceive his own infirmity if he is not allowed to be tempted a little, either by things that oppress his body, or his soul. For then, comparing his own weakness with God's help, he will straightway understand the greatness of the latter [God's help].

And again, whenever he looks over the multitude of his devisings, and his wakefulness, his abstinence, the sheltering, and the hedging about of his soul by which he hopes to find assurance for her, and yet sees that he has not obtained it, or again, if his heart has no calm because of his fear and trembling: then at that moment let him understand, and let him know that this fear of his heart shows and reflects that he is altogether in need of some other help. For the heart testifies inwardly, and reflects the lack of something by the fear which strikes and wrestles within it. And because of this, it is confounded, since it is not able to abide in a state of surety; for God's help, he says, is the help that saves. When a man knows that he is in need of Divine help, he makes many prayers. And by as much as he multiplies them, his heart is humbled, for there is no man who will not be humbled when he is making supplication and entreaty. 'A heart that is

broken and humbled, God will not despise.' Therefore, as long as the heart is not humbled, it cannot cease from wandering; for humility collects the heart.

But when a man becomes humble, at once mercy encircles him, and then his heart is aware of Divine help, because it finds a certain power and assurance moving in itself. And when a man perceives the coming of Divine help, and that it is this which aids him, then at once his heart is filled with faith, and he understands from this that prayer is the refuge of help, a source of salvation, a treasury of assurance, a haven that rescues from the tempest, a light to those who are in darkness [etc.] From this time forward, he revels in the prayer of faith, his heart glistens with clear assurances, and does not continue in its former blindness and the mere speech of the tongue. When he thus perceives these things, he will acquire prayer in his soul like some treasures. And from his great gladness, the form of prayer is turned into shouts of thanksgiving. This is the very thing pronounced by one who has defined the form proper to each of our actions: 'Prayer is joy that sends up thanksgiving.' Here he speaks of the prayer that is achieved through the knowledge of God, that is, prayer that has been sent from God. For at that moment, a man does not pray with labor and weariness (as is the rest of his prayer, which is prayed before the experiencing of this grace), and because his heart is full of joy and wonder, it continually wells up gratitude while he silently bows the knees....

The Tradition of the Pascha Basket

On the Great Feast of Pascha, many Orthodox Christians bring to the church a basket containing those foods that they have abstained from during the Fast—both meat and dairy products.

The rich Paschal Bread (kulich, full of eggs and butter) symbolizes Christ, the living bread (John 6:51) who came down from Heaven to give life to the world. The meat products symbolize the sacrificial animals of the Old Testament, which foreshadow the true sacrifice of our Savior. The dairy products, especially the rich cheese pascha, remind us of the prosperity of peace of the Messianic times which had been foretold by the Prophets. Eggs were always considered a symbol of resurrection—the emergence of new life. Our Savior came forth from the tomb as chick from its egg at birth.

The Pascha basket is usually covered with a decorated scarf or white cover. The baskets are blessed following the Paschal Liturgy: after Liturgy, pull back the cover that the contents may be blessed and light the decorated candle included in your basket. After the baskets have been blessed, our custom is to break the fast together. (Some consider it proper to eat first of what is in the basket before moving on to other food.) As we endure the struggle of the Fast together, it is fitting that we share

together the joy of Christ's Resurrection and the Feast it brings to us.

The Services of Great and Holy Week

Beginning with the evening of Palm Sunday, the Orthodox Christian is called upon to *accompany* Christ along the road of His voluntary passion and death. As a fellow traveller with Christ, a person must abandon the pleasures of this world. He must be purified in his entire being. He must fervently seek union with his Lord and Savior. The life of the Church actualizes these necessities in the Holy Mysteries of Confession and Communion. Only after being purified and forgiven in the Mystery of Confession and firmly united with Christ in the Mystery of Holy Communion can the Orthodox believer approach the hallowed ground of accompanying Christ in the great hour of His work for the redemption of all.

As we stand in church on the evening of Palm Sunday, we are sunk in darkness. This is the end. We have seen the light: Christ has triumphed over the darkness of death by raising His friend Lazarus. He has sought—and received—the acclamation of His Kingship by His people Israel: “Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord.” We have held high our palm branches and accepted His Kingdom. But now these palms lie at home, and we stand in darkness. The end has come.

The first three days of Holy Week are referred to in the Church as “the End.” Jesus was walking in the very midst of those who sought to take His life. He experienced deep anguish within Himself (John 12:27). Despite the triumph of the Palm weekend, which had confirmed the outcome of His passion even before it had taken place, the Lord had already told His disciples that “He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Mt 16:21).

The moment of truth had arrived. No longer did Jesus speak to the people from boats or in the countryside. He spoke openly in Jerusalem itself. He confronted His enemies and publicly refuted them. Addressing Himself to the religious leaders and students of the Divine Law, the Pharisees, scribes, and elders, Jesus called them hypocrites, blind guides, murderers, and liars.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in. (Mt 23:13)

He went directly to the Temple and cleansed it of the crooked moneychangers. He spoke to them sharply: “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’; but you make it a den of robbers” (Mt 21:13). He refuted all the questions which the leaders put to Him in order to “entangle Him in His talk” (Mt 22:15 ff). He condemned the fig tree which had not brought forth fruit. He spoke and acted with great urgency: “Now is the judgment of this world,

now shall the ruler of this world be cast out” (John 12:31). The moment of truth revealed that even in the supposedly most religious and righteous places, the world was under the sway of evil. The Messiah came to inaugurate a New Age.

The Bridegroom Services

On Palm Sunday evening, the services of Holy Week begin. Long Gospel readings on the first three days divulge the entire content of the final discourses of Christ. In these discourses, He is far from the “sweet Jesus” of popular imagery. He speaks with clarity concerning the end of this age.

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only...

Watch, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. (Mt. 24:36, 42)

Judgment and the End

We see the sin and darkness which triumph in “this world” loom before us as we follow Christ as He approaches the Cross. On the first three “great and holy” days of this week, it is the Gospel read at the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, the “end” of each liturgical day—when “the light of Christ illumines all”—that the “theme” of the whole day is revealed. On Monday, the theme is quite simply the End: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away” (Mt 24:3-35). On Tuesday, we are minded of the vigilance and care required of all Christians as we hear Christ’s parables of the ten virgins and of the talents, and we are filled with “holy fear” as we listen to Him prophesy the Last Judgment (Mt 24:36-26:2). On Wednesday, we hear about the harlot who anoints Christ’s feet to prepare Him for His burial, and of Judas who judges her, mercilessly condemning her act of mercy (Mt 26:6-16). Indeed, “The Light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). And this darkness brings judgment.

Judgment is the theme of the Gospel read in darkness each evening at Matins. On Monday, we hear of the barren fig tree which Christ curses and cause to be dried up (Mt 21:18-43); on Tuesday, of the blind and hypocritical Pharisees (Mt 22:15-23, 39); and on Wednesday, of the final rejection of Christ: “Now is the judgment of the world” (John 12:17-50).

The two themes of darkness and judgment are combined in the troparion sung at Matins on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday:

Behold! the Bridegroom comes at midnight, and blessed is the servant whom He shall find watching; and again, unworthy is the servant whom He shall find heedless. Beware, therefore, O my soul, do not be weighted down with sleep, lest you be given up to death, and lest you be shut out of the Kingdom. But rouse yourself, crying: “Holy! Holy! Holy! art Thou, O our God. Through the Theotokos, have mercy on us!”

Midnight is the time for us to keep vigil, to watch and pray. The night time of “this world” is when we look for the coming of the Kingdom of God. The parable of the ten wise and foolish virgins who went out to meet the bridegroom forms the basis of this

special troparion sung at the beginning of Matins each day. Ten virgins went out to meet the bridegroom. They were not sure when He would come. Five took sufficient oil for their lamps, five did not. The five who came unprepared had to return to buy more oil. At midnight, while these are gone, the bridegroom came, and the virgins who were prepared entered the bridal hall with him to begin the marriage feast. The bridal hall is the Kingdom of Heaven. The Bridegroom is Christ. He comes at an hour when we least expect Him. We must "watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Mt. 25:13).

In view of this special troparion, the Matins of the first three days of Holy Week are commonly called "The Bridegroom Service." This service is customarily served in anticipation on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday evenings (instead of the time appointed in the wee hours of the morning). Throughout the services, we are never allowed to forget that Christ the Bridegroom who comes is God, the God who created man in the beginning and who now comes to do all things for his salvation in His love for mankind. He constantly demands that we return this love, and that we show to others the same mercy that He shows to us. On Great and Holy Thursday (Wednesday evening), the last of the Bridegroom Services is celebrated, and there we see this vital Christian requirement of love put to the ultimate test. For the last time, we sing the exapostilarion, which forms the only link between all of the services of the first four days of Holy Week:

Thy Bridal Chamber I see adorned, O my Savior, but I have no wedding garment that I may enter. O Giver of Light, enlighten the vesture of my soul, and save me.

This special hymn, sung near the end of the service, tells us, in effect, that in our present state we are not ready to meet the Lord. There is no room for pride, callousness, or the recounting of our good deeds. We must repent, i.e., have an inner change of mind and heart, before we enter the Kingdom.

Betrayal

The first three days of Holy Week are concluded by the clandestine betrayal of Christ by one of His own disciples—Judas. Even after His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Christ continued to withdraw from the city at night. Out of fear of the masses, the leaders did not arrest Him, and He moved about the city during the day. It was necessary that one of His companions betray Him by revealing to the leaders the location of his nocturnal abode as well as His identity in the group. Judas filled this need.

On this day, the beginning of Great and Holy Thursday, as we enter Christ's chamber together with the glorious apostles to partake of His table, we see the impious traitor Judas sitting indeed at the table with no wedding garment. The troparion of this day says:

When the glorious disciples were enlightened at the washing of their feet before the supper, then the impious Judas was darkened, ailing with avarice, and to the lawless judges he betrays Thee, the righteous

Judge. Behold, O lover of money, this man who because of money hanged himself. Flee from the greedy soul which dared such things against the Master. O Lord, who art good towards all men, glory to Thee!

We realize that all of the things we have heard about and experienced this week, all the things we have been called to do and to be in order to partake worthily of the Master's table, are impossible without Christ's mercy and help. And now we stand in the lengthening shadow of Calvary. Judas has made his choice. He has hanged himself in remorse, and Christ is in the hands of lawless men.

What motivated Judas to commit this terrible act? In the mind of the Church, the motive is the greed for money and a general love for the choking pleasures of this world. Judas had the same opportunity to be with Jesus and to learn at His feet, but he "refused to understand," as the Church hymns say. He exchanged all this for thirty pieces of silver. The question remaining to be answered by us is this: What is Christ worth in our lives? Do we take proper advantage of all the opportunity given to us to live in Him and learn of Him in the Church?

The End becomes our "end" if we, too, join in rejecting the Light and Life of the world, or share in selling the Master of all in order to satisfy our own, self-centered motivations.

Holy Friday Matins—the 12 Gospels

The Matins of Holy Friday commonly celebrated on the evening of Holy Thursday and known as "The Order of the Holy Passions of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," or, more popularly, as "The Passions" or "Twelve Gospels," is a climactic point of the entire task set before us during Holy Week. During this wonderful service, we accompany Christ, step by step, from the time of His last discourse with His disciples to His being laid in a new tomb by the noble Joseph of Arimathea and the pious Nicodemus. Each of the twelve Gospel sections read during the service involves us in a new scene: the arrest and trial before Annas and Caiaphas, the Jewish High Priests; the threefold denial of Peter; the trial and other happenings before Pontius Pilate; the scourging and mocking by the soldiers; the carrying of the Cross; the engaging of Simon of Cyrene; the Crucifixion and the opposing fates of the two thieves hung with Christ; the loving tenderness of that moment when Jesus commits His Mother to the care of His faithful disciple John; the Lord's final yielding up of the spirit, and burial.

The twelve Gospel readings, however, are only a part of the service. The Gospel texts narrate the events. The hymnography gives the *response of the Church*, the community of true Christian believers from all ages, to these events. The hymnography clarifies and gives deeper meaning as well as the proper sense of significance to the narrations which the Gospel relates with such epic simplicity. We are confronted and perplexed by the horrid and sobering question of what caused Judas to betray his Master,

and the Master's own people to crucify Him. We are comforted and uplifted by signs of hope for us in the repentance of the thief and the Cross as life and resurrection for us.

The total effect of this integration of the twelve Gospels and the responsorial hymnography is to uplift each participant of the service into the total life of the Church. In this life, past, present, and future are one, and our own accompanying of Christ is not merely a dramatic enactment of past and irrelevant events, but a *reality*. The entire spectrum of our Lord's saving Passions is opened before us, and we are placed *within that spectrum*. With it, a judgment begins to come upon us. Where do we stand in reference to all those who are accompanying Christ on the road of His Passion? Do we share a common spirit with the treacherous Judas, the scheming priests, the fearful and abandoning disciples, or the denying Peter? Do we in any way find ourselves among the fickle and unruly crowds, or the mocking and blasphemous groups of soldiers? Is the indifference of Pilate in any way indicative of our response to Christ? Hopefully, we perhaps see ourselves more clearly in the devotion of the disciple John, or in the confessing centurion, or the faithful Joseph of Arimathea, or, most of all, in the repentant thief.

The following points can serve as a summary of the Matins of Holy Friday. First, the Passions of Jesus Christ can never be viewed by the Orthodox Christian as but past events having no bearing on his life today. Each year, the liturgical experience of the Matins of Holy Friday has us actually accompanying Christ along the road of His Passion. Second, this experience puts us within the personalities and events of the Passions and confronts us with moment after moment of judgment upon ourselves. Third, we are also called upon to understand clearly the nature and ultimate purpose of the Passions. Through them, salvation becomes a real possibility for us. Moreover, the example of the agony experienced by Christ in this world shows us most clearly that "for him who above all things seeks the Kingdom of Heaven, transfiguration begins in this life on earth."

Vespers of Holy Friday

On Great and Holy Friday, Christ died on the Cross. He gave up His spirit with the words: "It is finished." These words are better understood when rendered: "It is consummated." He had accomplished the work for which His heavenly Father had sent Him into the world. He became a man in the fullest sense of the word. He accepted the baptism of repentance from John in the Jordan River. He assumed the whole human condition, experiencing all its alienation, agony, and suffering, concluding with the lowly death on the Cross.

On Holy Friday, evil triumphed. "It was night" when Judas departed from the Last Supper to complete his act of betrayal, and "there was darkness over all the land" when Jesus was hanging on the Cross. The evil forces of this world had been massed against Christ. Unjust trials convicted Him. A

criminal was released to the people instead of Him. Nails and a spear pierced His body. Bitter vinegar was given to Him to quench His thirst. Only one disciple remained faithful to Him. Finally, the tomb of another man become His place of repose after death. The innocent Jesus was put to death on the basis of both religious (breaking the Law, blasphemy) and political charges (claim to be king in place of Caesar). Both Jews and Gentile Romans participated in His death sentence.

We, also, in many ways, continue to participate in the death sentence given to Christ. The formal charges against Him do not exhaust the reasons for the crucifixion. Behind the formal charges lay a host of injustices brought on by hidden and personal motivations. Jesus openly spoke the truth about God and man. He thereby exposed the false character of the righteousness and smug security, both religious and material, claimed by many—especially those in high places. The constantly occurring expositions of such smugness in our own day teach us the truly illusory nature of much so-called righteousness and security. In the deepest sense, the death of Christ was brought about by hardened, personal sin—the refusal of people to change themselves in the light of *reality*, which is Christ. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." Especially we, the Christian people, are Christ's very own. He continues to come to us in His Church. Each time we attempt to make the Church into something other than the eternal coming of Christ into our midst, each time we refuse to repent for our wrongs, we, too, reject Christ and participate in His death sentence.

The Vespers, celebrated in the Church on Holy Friday afternoon, brings to mind all of the final events of the life of Christ as mentioned above: the trial, the sentence, the scourging and mocking, the crucifixion, the death, the taking down of His body from the Cross, and the burial. As the hymnography indicates, these events remain ever-present in the Church; they constitute the *today* of its life.

The death of Christ was of a wholly voluntary character. He dies not become of some necessity in His being; as the Son of God, He has life in Himself! Yet, He voluntarily gave up His life as the greatest sign of God's love for man, as the ultimate revelation of the Divine glory.

Near the end of the Vespers, the priest vests fully in dark vestments. At the appointed time, he lifts the Holy Shroud, a large icon depicting Christ lying in the tomb, from the altar table. A procession is formed and the Holy Shroud is carried to a specially prepared tomb in the center of the church. As the procession moves, the troparion is sung:

The noble Joseph, when he had taken down Thy most pure body from the tree, wrapped it in fine linen and anointed it with spices, and placed it in a new tomb.

At this ultimate solemn moment of Vespers, the theme of hope once again occurs—this time more strongly and clearly than ever. As knees are bent and heads bowed, and often tears are shed, another

troparion is sung which penetrates through this triumph of evil to the new day which is contained in its very midst:

The Angel came to the myrrh-bearing women at the tomb and said: "Myrrh is fitting for the dead, but Christ has shown Himself a stranger to corruption.

A new age is dawning. Our salvation is taking place. The One who died is the same One who will rise on the third day to "trample down death by death" and to free us from corruption.

Therefore, at the conclusion of Holy Friday Vespers, at the end of this long day of darkness when all things are apparently ended, our eternal hope for salvation springs forth. For Christ is indeed a stranger to corruption.

Matins of Holy Saturday—the Lamentations

The "Great and Holy Sabbath" is the day which connects Holy Friday, the commemoration of the Cross, with Pascha, the day of the Resurrection. In this service, normally served Friday evening, we initially stand before Christ's tomb as mourners. Yet we do not stop with the mere mourning of a loss. We recognize that Christ has descended into Hades to confront Death and to break his hold over the human race. Life confronts Death and prevails. This victory is portrayed in the dramatic reading of Ezekiel's prophecy of the dry bones returning to life as living men. Already we begin to anticipate the Resurrection.

Vespers of Holy Saturday—15 OT Readings

At the Liturgy of Holy Saturday, 15 texts from the Old Testament are read, each of them centered on the promise of the Resurrection and glorifying the ultimate victory of God. The Epistle, Romans 6:3-11 connects our Baptism to Christ's death and Resurrection. During the special verse "Arise, O God, and judge the earth" after the Epistle, the dark lenten vestments of the clergy and church are put aside and replaced with bright white ones to make present the light of the Resurrection when the Gospel proclaiming Christ's resurrection is read. In Fr. Schmemmann's words, "One can and must say that of all services of the Church that are inspiring, meaningful, revealing, this one—the Vespers of St. Basil on the Great & Holy Saturday is truly the liturgical climax of the Church."

Compiled from various articles by Frs. P. Lazar & A. Schmemmann

The Church & the Bible

Fr. Georges Florovsky

The Orthodox Catholic Church is commonly supposed to be, as it were, over-liturgical and to have underestimated the preaching of the Word. This is an obvious misunderstanding. The rites of the Church are basically the preaching of the Word, and emphatic proclamation of the Good News. The skeleton of the order of the services (Vespers, Compline, Hours, Matins, etc.) is Scriptural in that the scheme of the history of God's plan of salvation is woven through them. Most of the hymns and troparia are Biblical in their inspiration and content. Readings

from the Scriptures are incorporated into all the worship services. The sermon is regarded as an integral part of corporate worship, especially on Sundays and special occasions.

Everything is oriented towards the redeeming events of the past, in which the reality of the Church is existentially rooted. The whole structure of worship is corporate in its inspiration and objective. Private devotions are used to prepare the individual to share in the fellowship of the whole fellowship of believers, the Church.

The ultimate aim of worship is to establish and to perpetuate an intimate communion with God, in Christ Jesus, and in the community of His Church. The ultimate emphasis is spiritual. The aim of Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, by whom believers are established in the fellowship of the Church.

Hence, as the services are basically the preaching of the Word, we do well to attend the services and to listen attentively to better understand our faith, to acquire a more fully Christian mindset, and to encounter God. This Holy Week come to hear the Faith proclaimed! —Fr. Justin

From the Desert Fathers

A holy man who had seen someone in the act of committing a sin wept bitterly and said, 'He today, and I tomorrow. In truth, even if someone commits sin in your presence, do not judge him, but consider yourself a worse sinner than he.'

St. John of Kronstadt on Prayer

We must carefully tend the field of our heart, let the tares of every vice should grow in it; we must daily weed it—at least by morning and evening prayers—and water it with abundant tears, as with rain.

Our heart dies spiritually every day. Only ardent, tearful prayer can restore it to breath and life. If we do not pray fervently every day, we may easily and speedily overtaken by spiritual death.

With sincere Christians, prayer is continual, because we continually sin; gratitude is perpetual, because every day, every moment, we receive fresh mercies from God, beside the old mercies, which are numberless. Praise is also perpetual, because we perpetually see the glory of God's works in ourselves and in the world, especially the glory of his infinite love towards us.

Prayer for others is very beneficial to the man himself who prays; it purifies the heart, strengthens faith and hope in God, and arouses love for God and our neighbor.

Upcoming Events 2017

9-15 April: Holy Week
15 April 10:00 a.m. Wells/Jones Baptism
16 April Holy Pascha, 3:00 p.m. Picnic, Egg Hunt
21 April Bright Friday Liturgy: We host other OCA priests and faithful.
24 April – 4 May Fr. Justin to Mt. Athos.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!