

ENTRANCE INTO JERUSALEM



## Fire & Light

### St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✘ April 8, 2012 ✘

## Palm Sunday

### The Triumphal Entry of Our Lord into Jerusalem

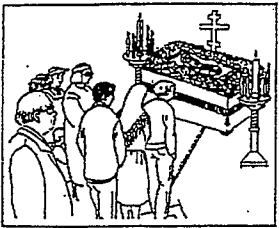
The Holy Apostles of the 70,

Herodion, Agabus, Asyncritus, Rufus, Phlegon, & Hermes (1<sup>st</sup> C)



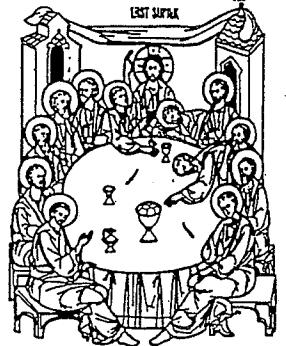
## Holy Week

- ✘ Tonight ~ 5:00pm Bridegroom Matins
- ✘ April 9 & 10 - Holy Monday & Tuesday ~ 6:30pm Bridegroom Matins
- ✘ April 11 - Holy Wed 6:30pm Holy Unction
- ✘ April 12 - Holy Thurs 10:00am Mystical Supper Liturgy  
6:30pm 12 Passion Gospels



### ✘ Holy Friday Services ✘ April 13 ~

- ✘ 10:00am Royal Hours
- ✘ 4:00pm Vespers – Shroud to the Tomb
- ✘ 7:00pm Lamentations at the Tomb
- ✘ *All Night Vigil at the Tomb* ✘



- ✘ Holy Saturday ~ April 14 10:00am Divine Liturgy –  
⇒ *Pascha Preparation following – help needed*

✘ Holy PASCCHA ✘ Begins Saturday, April 14 at 11:30pm

✘ Pascha Sunday April 15 3:00pm ~ Paschal Agape Vespers

✘ Bright Monday April 16 10:00am Divine Liturgy w/ Procession

⇒ Bright Friday ~ Ritchey Pascha Party / Pascha Egg Hunt ~ Sunday, April 22



### A Twofold Death – A Twofold Resurrection

✘ "As the evil one procured our twofold death by means of his single spiritual death, so the good Lord healed this twofold death of ours through His single bodily death, and through the one Resurrection of His Body gave us a twofold Resurrection. By means of His bodily death He destroyed him who had power over our souls and bodies in death, and rescued us from his tyranny over them both. The evil one clothed himself in the serpent to deceive man, but the Word of God put on man's nature to trick the trickster. He received this nature in its undeceived and pure state, and kept it so to the end, offering it as firstfruits to the Father for sanctification from ourselves for ourselves."

St. Gregory Palamas (1359)

✘ **One should nourish the soul with the Word of God:** for the word of God, as St. Gregory the Theologian says, is **angelic bread**, by which are nourished souls who hunger for God. Most of all, one should occupy oneself with reading the New Testament and the Psalter, which one should do standing up. From this there occurs an enlightenment in the mind, which is changed by a Divine change.

St. Seraphim of Sarov (1833)

## **The Sabbath and the Lord's Day**

A member of our community asked a question about the Sabbath. Two of his colleagues at work, a Baptist and a Seventh Day Adventist, were debating as to which is the correct Sabbath day, Saturday or Sunday. The Adventist said worship should be on Saturday instead of Sunday – to which we say, wrong! The Baptist said the Sabbath has moved to Sunday – also wrong.

Seventh Day Adventists are focused on Saturday being the Sabbath still and as the proper day to worship instead of Sunday. From the Orthodox historical perspective, that is seen as Judaizing - going back to aspects of Judaism, an early heresy from which Christians have moved on.

The Orthodox Church still recognizes Saturday as the Sabbath, as a day of rest. It is the day on which we remember that God rested from creation on the 7th day, and the Lord Jesus rested in the tomb on this day of the "Blessed Sabbath," and in the Church we likewise remember the departed (and the martyrs, especially) on Saturdays. Saturday as Sabbath, has its own character and recognition.

But, Sunday is the new Lord's Day. It is the *8th Day* - the day beyond time - the Day of Resurrection. It's still called that in Russian; in Greek and Romanian, it's called "The Day of the Lord." (In Russian, Saturday is Sabbota – Sabbath and similar in Romanian.) This is the day for Christians - the day of Christ's Resurrection from the dead. It has *surpassed* the Sabbath.

The Sabbath didn't move to Sunday. It was surpassed, transcended and supplanted by Christ's victory over death - a new Christian day - the *Lord's Day*, the Day of Christ's Resurrection!

### ***Every Sunday is a small Pascha!***

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#### **REFLECTION – "They know not what they do."**

✘ **Even in His pain on the Cross**, the Lord Jesus did not condemn sinners but offered pardon to His Father for their sins saying, "They know not what they do!" (St. Luke 23:34). Let us not judge anyone so that we will not be judged. For no one is certain that before his death he will not commit the same sin by which he condemns his brother. Saint Anastasius of Sinai teaches, "Even if you see someone sinning, do not judge him for you do not know what the end of his life will be like. The thief, crucified with Christ, entered Paradise and the Apostle Judas went to Hell. Even if you see someone sinning, bear in mind that you do not know his good works. For many have sinned openly and repented in secret; we see their sins, but we do not know their repentance. That is why, brethren, let us not judge anyone so that we will not be judged." **St. Nikolai of Serbia**

#### **We must have humility**

✘ When fulfilling the commandments of God, we must have humility, and if the power of the commandments weakens in us, then humility will intercede for us. But when we do good works and want to be assured that we are being saved, and see salvation in the palm of our hand, then we are very much mistaken. We should do good works without noticing them, and credit our correction to God and His help, and truly humble ourselves, not falsely. **St. Macarius of Optina**

**We are not at liberty to hate anything in God's creation, including ourselves.**

~ Archimandrite Meletios Webber

**Most of our sins happen because we forget the commandments of God.**

~ St. Nikon of Optina

# The Meaning of Christ's Suffering

Frederica Matthewes-Green, March 1, 2004

Graphic meditation on Christ's suffering doesn't appear before the medieval era, approximately the 14th century. Before that the presentation is more in accord with the way Christ appears in the Gospel of John. In iconography, He reigns serene from the Cross, a victorious Conqueror who has rescued us from Death.

In fact, the concept of "rescue" is the key. The wounds that Christ sustained are like those of a hero. Imagine that a young policeman has rescued some hostages at great physical cost, including his own capture and torture. It would be unseemly, even insulting, to continually ask him, "How did it feel when they tortured you? What did it look like? Where did you bleed?" The officer would understandably wish you'd focus not on his humiliation but on his victory.

That's the attitude we see in these ancient hymns from Holy Week: "The sun was darkened, for it could not bear to see such outrage done to God, before whom all things tremble...When Thou was crucified, O Christ, all the creation saw and trembled. The foundations of the earth quaked in fear of thy power. The lights of Heaven hid themselves...The hosts of angels were amazed." A hymn from the 4th century Liturgy of St. Basil is familiar even to some Protestants: "Let all earthly flesh keep silent, and with fear and trembling stand."

Devotion didn't simply change with the times; the same awe-filled reticence continues unchanged in Eastern Orthodox devotion today. Something else happened to cause this change in European Christianity, and move the focus from Christ's victory to his sufferings as the means of salvation.

Western theologians usually say that the greatest event in the development of salvation theology was the publication of the treatise "Why did God become Man?" by Anselm, the 11th century Archbishop of Canterbury. Picture the landscape when Anselm tackled his work. Scriptures talk about Christ' death being a ransom or redemption, and up till then this had been chiefly understood as a ransom from the Devil. "The wages of sin is Death," and due to our sins we were enslaved by death, poisoned and helpless to resist sin. Christ comes on a rescue mission, and in the process he suffers very much like that policeman rescuing the hostages. As a human, he dies and gains entrance to Hades; once there he blasts it open, as God, and sets the captives free.

Some early writers elaborated on the question "Who received this ransom?," unwisely it would seem. Today their analogies seem crude, for example, that God lured the Devil by hiding Christ's divinity inside his humanity, and the Devil responded like a fish grabbing a baited hook (Gregory of Nyssa) or like a mouse going into a trap (Augustine).

But when we speak of Christ paying with his blood, we don't necessarily have to imagine a two-sided transaction. The brave policeman, above, "paid with his blood" to free the hostages, but that doesn't mean the kidnappers were left gloating over a vial of blood. When the Lord ransomed his people out of Egypt, Pharaoh did not accept a fat bag of gold in exchange. "Redeem" can just mean "doing what is necessary to set free."

Further, the young officer might have said "I offer this mission to the honor of my chief, who has always been like a dad to me. I love him and want to do his will, and I am making this sacrifice in his name." The chief didn't receive the young man's blood either - a bizarre thought - nor did he require that blood before the hostages were freed; he was not their captor, but an ally in the rescue. So take a grammatically giant step back and see these terms in a looser sense. Sometimes we use images like "paid" to mean a simple act of giving, without envisioning a two-sided transaction that includes a receiving on the other end.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus ("The Theologian" - 4th century) protested that the question of "Who received the payment?" should not be pressed hard. No matter what debt the Devil was owed it could not possibly have included God Himself. On the other hand, the Father could not have been the recipient of the ransom, since he was not the one holding us captive. And if the blood of Isaac had not pleased him, why would he desire the blood of His beloved Son?

St. Gregory sums up: the Father accepts Christ's sacrifice without having demanded it; the Son offers it to honor him; and the result is the defeat of the Evil One. "This is as much as we shall say of Christ; the greater portion shall be revered with silence."

Anselm took aim at the exaggerated versions of the ransom theory, but didn't agree to leave the greater portion to silence. He theorized that the payment was made to God the Father. In Anselm's formulation, our sins were like an offense against the honor of a mighty ruler. The ruler is not free to simply forgive the transgression; restitution must be made. (This is a crucial new element in the story; earlier Christians believed that God the Father did, in fact, freely forgive us, like the father of the Prodigal Son.) No human would be adequate to pay this debt, so God the Son volunteers to do so. "If the Son chose to make over the claim He had on God to man, could the Father justly forbid Him doing so, or refuse to man what the Son willed to give him?" Christ satisfies our debt in this, the "Satisfaction Theory."

"And that has made all the difference," as a tousled Yankee poet liked to say. Western Christian theology marched on from that point, encountering controversies and developments and revisions, but locked on the idea that Christ's death was directed toward the Father. When Western theologians look back at the centuries before Anselm they can't find his theory anywhere (well, there are some premonitions in Tertullian and Cyprian, but it wasn't the mainstream.). You can read St. Paul to support the "satisfaction" view, so Anselm is hailed as the first theologian to understand St. Paul.

That's a stretch, though. Would Christians really have *misunderstood* their salvation for a thousand years? Did the people St. Paul wrote his letters to have no idea what he was talking about? Did the early martyrs die without understanding the Cross that saved them? Why would the Holy Spirit permit such a thing, if He was sent to lead them into all truth? Is the "plain meaning of Scripture" is so obscure that it couldn't be discerned for a thousand years, and then only by someone from a culture utterly different from its authors?

Western theologians search the pre-Anselmian millennium and can't find the theory they're after, but fail to see the theory that permeates there. Before Anselm, the problem salvation addresses is seen as located within us. We are infected by death as a result of Adam's Fall. This infection will cause us to be spiritually sick and to commit sin, both voluntarily and as a result of the Devil's deceptions. Christ offers to rescue us in accord with the Father's will, like the young police officer above. In this action, God the Father and the Son are united: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."

That's the "before" snapshot. With Anselm, the problem salvation addresses is between us and God (we have a debt we can't pay). After Anselm it is even sometimes formulated as *within* God (His wrath that won't be quenched until the debt is paid). This theory loses the unity of will between the Father and Son; it can appear that the Son has to overcome the Father's resistance. It loses the idea that the sickness is within us, and we need to be healed; it can appear that a legal acquittal is sufficient and a transformed life a nice afterthought at most.

Some rebelled against this formulation and claimed that it was too legalistic, too ethically superficial, too "Old Testament." They proposed instead that Christ's sufferings are just meant to

move us by example, so that we will turn and be reconciled with God. (In response to a similar proposition many centuries earlier Augustine had harrumphed that, if an example is all we needed, we didn't need Christ; the human condition would have been cleared up with Abel.)

In all these varied "after" snapshots, however, the wounds and suffering are the major point. It is the pain of the Passion that saves us, whether objectively (by paying a debt) or subjectively (by moving our hearts). From Julian of Norwich's meditations on the Crown of Thorns, to "O Sacred Head Sore Wounded," to Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" is a single devotional thread.

This is a strand that has produced powerfully affecting works of art, and moved and inspired Christians for centuries. The Crucifixion was, in fact, bloody and brutal - Gibson is on good historical ground in wishing to depict them this way - and when he prayerfully reads the Gospels, no doubt these are the pictures that appear in his mind.

But they are not, actually, there. The writers of the Gospels chose to describe Jesus' Passion a different way. Instead of evoking empathy they invite us to grateful, respectful awe, because they had a different understanding of the meaning of his suffering. ✕ ✕ ✕

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## **HOMILY ~ About the Wondrous Stone in Zion**

**"Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believes in it shall not be ashamed" (Isaiah 28:16).**

Brethren, this wondrous stone is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. For if the Prophet thought of it as an ordinary stone, he would not have mentioned faith in it [the stone], otherwise he would have prophesied idolatry. The Prophet Daniel also speaks about a stone which rolled down the hill and smashed the great idol and grew as a great mountain and filled the whole earth: "Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were made of iron and clay and broke them into pieces...and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:34-35). The prophecy about the stone in Daniel is for pagans and the prophecy about the stone in Isaiah is for Jews.

The Lord Jesus Christ is that stone which is laid first, in the foundation of God's entire creation, for He is the Word of God and the Wisdom of God; second, as the foundation of the Old Testament as the preparation and third, as the foundation of the New Testament as the fulfillment. The "cornerstone", that is the firmest and the strongest stone which connects and joins other stones and holds the walls of various directions [angels] in oneness and in wholeness.

If we observe the Lord Christ within us, He is the "cornerstone" which binds and ties our various spiritual capabilities in unity and wholeness so that all work toward one goal, in the direction of God and the Kingdom of God. If we observe Christ the Lord in the history of mankind, He is the "cornerstone" which ties and binds Judaism and paganism in one House of God, in the Church of God. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 3:11) says the Apostle of the New Testament in agreement with the Prophet of the Old Testament.

Whoever has, until now, believed in that Stone of Salvation was not ashamed. Neither will anyone ever be ashamed who would believe in it. For this stone is a "sure foundation" and truly a "chosen stone", a "precious and honorable stone".

*O Lord Jesus, our Stone of Salvation, strengthen the faith in us, that holy and salvific faith in Thee, our only Savior! To Thee be glory and thanks always! Amen. St. Nikolai of Ochrid*

**Just as one cannot build a ship unless one has some nails,  
so it is impossible to be saved without humility. ~ Mother Syncretica**

## HOMILY ~ About Pilate's Wavering “...a disciple of worldly wisdom”

*“Consequently, Pilate tried to release Him, then, he handed Him over to be crucified.” {John 19:12,16}*

From where does this contradiction in Pilate stem? From where is this dual will in one and the same man? While he stood under the radiant face of Christ, Pilate from all his heart wanted to release the Just Man. But, when the darkness of the Jews overcame him, he agreed to the works of darkness. This is the seed [Jesus Christ], fallen among the thorns. While the face of Christ shown on the seed, the seed took root, but as soon as the seed was left without this light, the darkness of the thorns smothered it.

When the Lord Jesus authoritatively spoke to Pilate of the Heavenly Kingdom, saying to him, “You would have no power over Me, if it had not been given to you from above” (St. John 19:11), Pilate then felt overcome by the fear of God. But when the masses of the Jews cried out to Pilate, “If you release Him, you are not a friend of Caesar” (St. John 19:12), then Pilate was overcome with fear from the worldly king. His fear for the body overcame his fear for his soul, as it happens occasionally, even today.

Pilate was a disciple of worldly wisdom. Worldly wisdom does not offer strength but instills fear. Worldly wisdom does not sustain the soul but the body. Worldly wisdom does not instill fear for the soul but fear for the body and all that is physical. Here, in Pilate, we see an obvious and a pathetic example of what kind of men worldly wisdom produces and educates, sidestepping God and going against Christ.

Pilate's weak character and wavering soul is a picture, not only of pagans, but also of weak Christians. Certain Christians daily, imperceptibly and, more often, unconsciously, would for a while like to eliminate Christ from the darkened and evil instinct of unbelief within themselves. Then, at other times, they would like to abandon Him to that instinct for crucifixion. This always happens when a Christian transgresses some of the commandments of Christ for the sake of fulfilling some of his own physical desires. For a moment, that commandment enlightens the heart of a wavering Christian and again, for a moment, the physical darkness overcomes him so much that he completely succumbs to it.

*O Lord, long-suffering, do not turn away the radiance of Thy face from us even for one twinkling of the eye, so that the darkness does not overcome us. O Lord, help us that we will remain children of the light until the end!*  
~ from the Prologue of St. Nikolai of Serbia

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### Words on the CROSS

✠ “I force not, I compel not, but each one I make lord of his own choice; wherefore also I say, ‘If any man will (come after Me).’ For to good things do I call you, not to things evil, or burdensome; not to punishment and vengeance, that I should have to compel.” -St. John Chrysostom

✠ To deny oneself means to give up one's bad habits; to root out of the heart all that ties us to the world; not to cherish bad thoughts and desires; to suppress every evil thought; to avoid occasions of sin; not to desire or to do anything out of self-love, but to do everything out of love for God. To deny oneself, according to St. Paul means “to be dead to sin. . . but alive to God.”

✠ A Christian's duty is to “take up his cross.” The word cross means sufferings, sorrows and adversities. To take up one's cross means to bear without grumblings everything unpleasant, painful, sad, difficult and oppressive that may happen to us in life. . . without expecting any earthly reward in return, but bear it all with love, with joy and with courageous strength.

St. Innocent of Alaska (1879)

✠ To bear our cross does not mean only visible, external sorrows, but also internal spiritual ones. One must endure darkness, faintheartedness, and similar things as well, For God sends this for the destruction of our pride, and acquiring of humility.

St. Macarius of Optina (1861)

⇒ We either venerate icons and crosses and the Incarnate God (including man as His image) or we make idols and ideologies and utopias. There is no middle ground. - Michael Bauman

## **HOMILY ~ The hand of the Betrayer**

**"And yet behold, the hand of the one who is to betray Me is with Me on the table."  
(Luke 22:21)**

It is most difficult for a general to wage war when he has an enemy within the camp; not only external enemies, but internal enemies among his own. Judas was considered among his own. However, he was the enemy from within. Rows of enemies crowded and closed ranks around Christ and, from within, Judas was preparing betrayal. His hand was on the table which Christ blessed, and his thoughts were aligned with the enemies where darkest evil, hatred and malice seethed against the gentle Lord.

Is it not also the same today, that the hand of the many traitors of Christ are at the table with Him? Which table is not Christ's? On what table are not His gifts? He is the Householder and He nourishes and feeds His guests. The guests have nothing of their own, nothing! All good and all abundance which is given to them is given to them by the hand of Christ. Therefore, is it not so that Christ is present at every table as a Householder and as a Servant? Therefore, are not those also the hands of all who even today betray Christ on the table together with Him? They eat His bread and they speak against Him. They warm themselves by His sun and they slander His name. They breathe His air and they rise up against His Church. They live off His mercy and they banish Him from their homes, from their schools, from their courts, from their books and from their hearts. They trample His commandments willfully, maliciously and ridicule His law. Are they not then the betrayers of Christ and the followers of Judas? Do not be afraid of them! God did not command that we be afraid of them but wait to see their end. Our Lord was not afraid of Judas nor is He afraid of all the traitorous hordes until the end of time. He knows their end and He already has His victory in His hands. Therefore, do not you be afraid either. Adhere faithfully to Christ the Lord, both when it appears to you that His causes succeed and go forward in the world and then, again, when it appears to you that His causes collapse and perish. Do not be afraid! If you become frightened, perhaps your hand will be found clenched under the hand of Judas at the table of Christ. O Lord, All-Victorious, sustain us with Thy power and mercy.

### **CONTEMPLATION~ To contemplate the Lord Jesus at prayer in Gethsemane:**

1. How He falls on His face and prays three times, "My Father if it is possible, let this cup pass from me" (St. Matthew 26:39), and again, "Your will be done" (St. Matthew 26:42).
2. How He sweated at prayer, "And His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (St. Luke 22:44).
3. How all of this was because of you and me; because of my sins and your sins; and for the sake of my salvation and your salvation.

## **HOMILY ~ Recognizing the Son of God among the Common Darkness**

***"Truly, this was the Son of God!"* (St. Matthew 27:54).**

These words were spoken by the captain who carried out his duties conscientiously as a soldier. Under orders of his superiors, he had to guard the body of Christ on Golgotha. Externally, like a machine, but internally, a soul wide awake.

He, a Roman soldier, a pagan, and an idolater, saw all that had occurred at the time of the death of Christ the Lord, and cried out: "Truly, this was the Son of God." Not knowing about the One God and not knowing the Law and the Prophets, he immediately comprehended that which the priests of the One God and authorities of the Law and the Prophets were unable to comprehend! The word of God came true: "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see, might see, and those who do see, might become blind" (St. John 9:39). Truly, he who was blind in the spirit saw and those who thought they could see were completely blinded. Was it not possible that

the elders of the Jews did not see the darkened sun, did not feel the earthquake, did not notice how the rocks were split, did not see that the veil in the Temple was rent, did not recognize many of the saints who came out from opened graves and appeared in Jerusalem? They saw all of this and all of them accurately witnessed all of this. Nevertheless, their spirits remained blind and their hearts, stony. All of these manifestations, the awesome and the unusual, they probably interpreted as the unbelieving would do today - accidents and illusions.

**The pagans of all times interpret everything as accidents or self-deceptions whenever the finger of God appears to reprimand men, to direct or to inform them.** The Roman captain Longinus, which was the soldier's name, saw all that occurred without prejudice and beneath the Cross confessed his faith in the Son of God. His exclamation was not wrested accidentally from his frightened heart. But that was his confession of faith, for which he later on laid down his life to embrace a better life in the Kingdom of Christ.

O brethren, how great is this Roman captain, who upon seeing the lifeless Lord between thieves crucified on the dunghill of Golgotha, recognized Him as God and confessed Him as God. O brethren, how petty are those Christians who recognize the Lord as Resurrected, as Glorified, as the Victor and the Victor-bearer through thousands of His Saints but, nevertheless, retain in their hearts doubt like a poisonous serpent who poisons them every day and buries their lives in eternal darkness. O Crucified and Resurrected Lord, have mercy on us and save us!

## **HOMILY ~ On Enduring to the End**

**"But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved " (St. Matthew 24:13).**

O Lord most wonderful, You have endured all, all to the end. That is why You became not only blessed but the source of blessings for all men who desire good for themselves throughout the ages of ages.

The Apostles endured all to the end and entered into blessed eternity. The saints willingly endured the difficulties and sufferings to the end and were glorified, both in heaven and on earth. The martyrs willingly endured all pains to the end and became the adopted co-inheritors of the Kingdom of Christ.

Every founder of a new organization recruits followers for himself with the promise of good fruits and many pleasures but deliberately remains silent about the hardships and labors which lead to those fruits and pleasures. Our Lord Jesus is the only one Who spoke the whole truth to His followers, both the bitter and the sweet side of the truth. He did not promise fruits without service, nor glory without suffering, nor ultimate rest without the thorny path, nor victory without struggle, nor pleasure without bitterness, nor the kingdom without tears and self-denial.

Although our Lord counted the many difficulties which would befall His followers, in the end He does not abandon them without comfort. He gives meaning to their sufferings and does not leave them in darkness. He says, "The one who perseveres to the end will be saved." What is that blessing which awaits those who endure to the end that He Jesus fully revealed and that has been witnessed even until today and is being witnessed by many saints, who, have either appeared in glory to the faithful from the other world or who, while yet in the flesh, were uplifted in the spirit to a vision of that glory and blessedness which await the faithful, the chosen and persevering?

O Lord, You are our strength. Help us to endure to the end with faith that You are beside us.

## **Liberated by the Truth**

We are all deceived, all deluded; we all find ourselves in a condition of falsehood; we all need to be liberated by the Truth. The Truth is our Lord Jesus Christ (John 8:32-14:6). Let us assimilate that Truth by faith in it; Let us cry out in prayer to this Truth, and it will draw us out of the abyss of demonic deception and self-delusion.

**St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (+1867)**



# EXAMINING OUR HEARTS BEFORE HOLY WEEK AND GREAT AND HOLY PASCHA

Very Rev. Fr. George Tsahakis, Atlanta

If we as Christians have an all-powerful Savior Whom we proclaim as our Risen Lord, what response are we offering to Him as our Savior and as our God?

We now approach the final trail of our Lenten journey leading to Holy Week, a period when we will remember in great detail and with deliberate care the Passion, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of our Lord. Before I commit my presence and participation, I find myself asking what difference, if any, it will make.

Perhaps the problem is me. Do I lack the vision to see God's presence and influence over us? Can I grasp His broken body and the blood flowing from His side that was shed for our forgiveness and the restoration of humanity to His Kingdom? Are the readings and reenactments cause to bring us into closer union with Him and His Body the Church, which includes all of you – my brothers and sisters in Christ? Or maybe we consider the Lenten and Holy Week services are simply the means for us to feel comfortable and self-satisfied that we elected to come when it was convenient for us to sample these familiar rituals, and this in itself is what is good and pleasing to our Lord and to our co-workers in Christ.

When if ever, during my life's journey leading up to His Glorious Kingdom beyond this life will I understand that I do not deserve any of God's divine grace?

Will I recognize that in participating in the services "remembering" our Risen Lord's Passion, Crucifixion, and Resurrection, I discern the very real yet invisible heavenly things that are unfolding right now and right here, for me, for you, for everyone . . . amidst my many busy and competing earthly pursuits and demands?

Do I ever call myself Christ's Disciple, His servant, and witness? If so, if challenged to prove I am indeed "guilty" of living a Christian life (here, guilty would be a good thing), could my actual deeds, thoughts, and words convince a jury to convict me? Or would I be judged "innocent" and thus be set free from a life burdened by the obligations of living a Christian life and willing obedience to follow and live a life with our Risen Lord Jesus Christ?

Recall how God commanded Moses to lead His people from the bondage of Pharaoh and the Egyptians to freedom and "the Promised Land" in the old Passover. But do we remember how some of Moses' people doubted and even resisted the pathway to freedom? What about us? Will our response this Holy Week and in the weeks, months, and years ahead be like them? Simply put, as we move into the "ages to come", will we be like Moses' people, who doubt, fear, and even resist God's call for us to let go of the chains and bondage of a life separated from Him, from those He created, and from those He enables us to meet and share with in our parish community? Will we believe, accept, and live in His "Promised Land" that we call His Body, His Church, His Kingdom here on earth and to be completed at His Second and Glorious Coming?

We as Christians have an all-powerful Savior Whom we proclaim as our Risen Lord. In His Behalf, as our Lord, God, and Savior, we seek in all things to embrace everyone we encounter with His love, mercy, and forgiveness to the best of our ability and always for His Glory! Then, and only then, can we truly proclaim that the Glory of God prevails and the message of his Passion, Death, and Resurrection is both proclaimed and lived, today, through us, and in the "ages to come" through the saints that come after us. Amen!

## **The Holy Church ~ A Venerable Woman**

✘ Our Faith and Church is like a most honored, holy, godly, firm, venerable woman, who never grows old, and in whom ever dwells a young, living spirit, giving life to her true children.

As we always behave with great respect to old people, honoring their grey hair and wisdom – the fruits of experience – and highly value each of their words, and apply them to our own life, so ought we especially to honor the Church, venerate her holiness, antiquity, her unshaken firmness, her divinely enlightened wisdom and spiritual experience, her soul-saving commandments and ordinances, her divine services, sacraments and rites. How can we do otherwise than respect her, even if only for having saved in her bosom an innumerable multitude of people, transplanting them into the abode of eternal peace and joy, not forgetting them even after their death, but remembering them until now upon earth, eternally praising and glorifying their virtues as her true children? Where will we find a more grateful friend, a more tender mother?

And therefore, may Christians attach themselves wholly and with all their hearts to the Church of Christ, that they may be firmly established unto the end of their temporal life! May they all be zealous of the fulfillment of all her commandments and ordinances, and may they obtain in her eternal salvation through Christ Jesus our Lord!

**St. John of Kronstadt (1908)**

## **The True Mother**

✘ Some men of “progress” look upon the Church as their enemy. But is there anyone more full of love, more desirous of our welfare, and wiser in her love for man (after God Himself) than the Church? Everything that is most comfortable to our nature and most necessary for its good, all this is contained in the Church as in a treasury, as the words of life are contained in the Gospel. The Church is the true Mother of all those who rightly believe in Christ, the truest friend of Christians. She sympathizes and answers to all the essential requirements of the soul and body of the Christian by active relief and by affording help through the power of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, in Whom our every soul lives.

**St. John of Kronstadt**

## **St. John Chrysostom - On our Behavior in Church**

✘ Do you not see the order of behavior at the pagan Olympic Games when the Arranger (Master of Ceremonies) passes through the arena with a wreath on his head, dressed in a lengthy garment, holding a staff in his hand and the Crier declares that there be silence and order? Is it not obscene that there, where the devil reigns there is such silence, and here (in church) where Christ invites us to Himself there is such an uproar! At the arena, silence: and in church, uproar! On the sea, calm and in the harbor, tempest!

When you are invited to a meal, you must not leave before the others, even though you are satisfied before the others, and here while the awesome mystery of Christ is being celebrated, while the priestly functions are still continuing, you leave in the middle of it and exit? How can this be forgiven? How can this be justified? Judas, after receiving Communion at the Last Supper [Mystical Supper] that final night, departed quickly while the others remained at the table. Behold, whose example do they follow who hurry to depart before the final thanksgiving?

**St. John Chrysostom (Homily on the Feast of Theophany)**

## **Wisdom from our holy Father Symeon the New Theologian:**

✘ We must therefore carefully discern the thoughts that come on us and set against them the testimonies from the divinely inspired Scriptures and from the teaching of the spiritual teachers, the holy Fathers, so that if we find them to agree with these witnesses and correspond to them we may with all our might hold fast these thoughts and boldly act on them... Search them (the holy Scriptures) and hold fast to what they say with great exactitude and faith, in order that you may know God's will clearly from the divine Scriptures and be able infallibly to distinguish good from evil and not obey every spirit nor be carried away with harmful thoughts. (Discourse 3)