

ENTRANCE INTO JERUSALEM



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

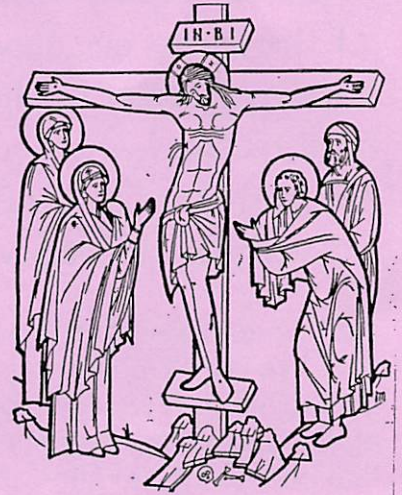
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✠ April 24, 2016 ✠

Palm Sunday

The Triumphal Entrance of Our Lord into Jerusalem



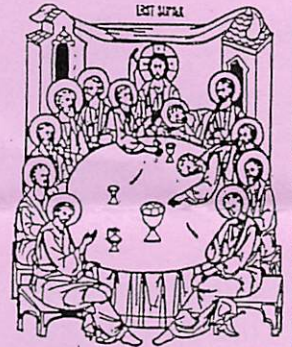
The Crucifixion

Holy Week 2016

- ✠ This Saturday, April 23 10:00am ~ Lazarus Saturday Divine Liturgy
➤ Parish Workday following Divine Liturgy & Lunch

Sat. April 23 6:00pm:

- ✠ Palm Sunday Vespers w/ Blessing of Palms
- ✠ Sun. April 24 Palm Sunday Matins & Divine Liturgy
- ✠ Palm Sunday Evening - 5:00pm ~ First Bridegroom Matins
- ✠ April 25/26 - Holy Monday & Tuesday ~ 6:30pm Bridegroom Matins
- ✠ April 27 - Holy Wednesday 6:30pm Holy Unction
- ✠ April 28 - Holy Thursday 10:00am Mystical Supper Liturgy
6:30pm 12 Passion Gospels



- ✠ **Holy Friday Services** ✠ April 29 - 10:00am Royal Hours



- 4:00pm Vespers – Shroud to the Tomb
- 7:00pm - Lamentations at the Tomb
- ✦ Youth All Night Vigil at the Tomb ✦

- ✠ Holy Saturday ~ April 30 ~ 10:00am Divine Liturgy
✠ The Blessed Sabbath ✠

- ✠ **Holy PASCHA** ✠ Begins Saturday, April 30 at 11:30pm

Bright Week

- ✠ Pascha Sunday May 1 ~ 3:00pm ~ Paschal Agape Vespers
- ✠ Bright Monday May 2 ~ 10:00am Paschal Liturgy w/ Procession
- Bright Friday Pascha Gathering at the Wells – May 6, 6:00pm



St. John of Kronstadt :

✠ “Looking upon the Savior’s Cross, contemplate Love, crucified upon it for our salvation; and think, for what blessedness He has saved us, and from what torments He has redeemed us! He has snatched us from the jaws of the beast and hast brought us to the Father! O love! O redemption! O indescribable, endless blessedness!”

ON HEALING

by

Fr. John Maxwell

One of the prominent things that we find our Lord doing during his earthly ministry was healing the sick. This acted as a sign of His messianic identity (Matt 11:5; Lk. 4:18, 7:22; Jn. 20:30-31) This however was not His only reason for healing. Repeatedly we read in the Gospels how the Lord healed because He had compassion on the multitude (Mt. 14:14, 20:34; Mk. 1:41). He indeed is the one who took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses (Matt. 8:17).

Now we believe as it is written that "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8). If He had compassion on men and women yesterday, He would still have compassion on us today, for He is and always will be the lover of mankind. Moreover, we believe that Christ remains in His Church (Matt. 18:20, 28:20; Eph. 1:22-23). Thus, Christ continues to heal in his Church to this day.

In the book of James we hear the formula of how the ancient healing services in the Church took place. *"And if any be sick, let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of our Lord: And the prayer of faith shall heal the sick, and our Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him"* (James 5:14-15).

From the beginning of Christianity to the present day this practice has been followed in the Orthodox Church. In addition to holding this service as the need arises in the case of illness, the Orthodox Church holds an anointing of the sick service for all its members called The Office of Holy Unction (anointing) once a year on Holy Wednesday. Some may wonder why they should come if they have no major illness. But who among us is not in need of the healing touch of Jesus? Is there any among us who do not stand in need of some kind of healing, whether it be physical, emotion or spiritual?

According to this passage in James, this service of the sick is administered through the elders (presbyters) of the Church. This does not deny the fact that there are those outside of Holy Orders (the ordained) who have been given gifts of healing. But when it comes to the services in the Church, everything is to be done decently and in order. (1 Corth. 14:40) Thus, the healing service in the Church is conducted by those who have the authority to consecrate, namely the Bishop and/or the Priests. There is no room for self appointed ministries grandstanding it, or for dog and pony shows. Healing is not done to draw attention to any person. Rather it should draw attention to Christ.

The service ideally takes place with seven priests (presbyters), although it can be done with just one priest. An Epistle and Gospel lesson is read, and a prayer is offered up to God on behalf of the sick. Then one of the priests anoints the sick person(s). This is repeated until all seven priests have anointed the sick.

The purpose of the anointing service is three-fold: First, it is a prayer that God will heal the sick person. Many miraculous healings have taken place through the entire history of the Church through this scriptural method of anointing the sick. I have witnessed several myself, and I would imagine that many of you can also bear testimony of such occurrences.

The Second purpose is that God would give the sick person the grace to bear whatever is placed upon him. In such cases the sickness is transfigured into a purifying and strengthening of the inner man, and unites one to the sufferings of Christ. St Paul we remember had the gift of healing. Christ working through him healed many people. However, when he had a "thorn in the flesh" (perhaps cataracts), and he prayed for healing three times, God's answer was my Grace is sufficient for you (II Cor. 12: 7-10)

The Final purpose, is also indicated in the Book of James. We read that the prayers and anointing of the elders with the oil, is for the forgiveness of sins. (5:15). Of course, not every sickness is the cause of personal sin. (John 9:1-3). It is equally true that some sicknesses are caused because of personal sin (John 5:14). In such cases where the sickness is the result of sin, with the healing of the body, God brings healing to the soul as well.

If the anointing by the elders (priests) of the Church was the practice of the ancient Church and continues to be practice in the Orthodox Church to this day, why is it that many churches do not hold healing services or even believe that divine healing is for today? Soon after the schism of 1054, in which The Orthodox Church of the East and the Roman Church of the West were separated from each other, the Roman Church dropped the Anointing Service and replaced it with what was called extreme unction (i.e. prayers and anointing for a person about to die). They did not restore the service for anointing the sick until 1962 at Vatican II.

With no place in Church for someone to be healed in the West, the Protestant Reformers did not think to re-introduce such a service to its adherents. In fact, John Calvin, who greatly influenced all four branches of Protestantism (Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican and Free), strongly believed that miraculous healings were no longer available now that we have the books of the New Testament. Many Protestants still believe this to this day. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Anglican Church in their *Book of Common Prayer* re-introduced a service for the sick. Unfortunately, it had no prayers for healing. Rather, the service was intended to make the sick person more aware of his sins for which he was being chastised.

It was mostly through fringe groups or new Protestant movements that healing services were re-introduced in the West. Tragically, not all of these services have been balanced. Some, for instance, have been presumptuous in their faith regarding healing and have refused proper medical help to their own or others detriment. Some have fallen victim to charlatans, who prey on peoples emotions for the gain of filthy lucre. Still others have been cruel in criticizing the sick for their supposed lack of faith. Some forget how many times our Lord told people, "Don't tell anybody about this" (Mt. 8:4; Mk. 7:36, 8:30; Lk. 5:14, 8:56, 9:21). Instead, these individuals

seem bent on letting the whole world know how Jesus healed these people through their ministries.

We hope that our faithful will make recourse to the sacrament of Holy Unction on Holy Wednesday as well as to the other services of Holy Week.

HOLY WEEK

by

Fr. John Maxwell

Throughout Holy Week we are invited to personally experience the events of our Lord's saving passion. These events took place in space and time but they are also eternal in nature. Because these events have an eternal dimension to them. They can also have an eternal effect on us in the here and now. As Christians, we choose to treat the sacred events of Holy Week, not as "mere" history but as the transforming events of all time. The services of the Church communicate this transforming sacramental grace to us when we participate in them by faith.

With this understanding, let us look briefly at the worship of the Church leading to Pascha. Great Lent ends on Friday following the fifth Sunday of Lent. The next day is Lazarus Saturday. Together with Palm Sunday, it forms a brief and bright prelude to the more sobering days to follow. Lazarus' resurrection is like a prophecy in action. This miracle by the hand of the Lord announces the resurrection of the dead as the consequence of Jesus' own coming resurrection. Likewise, Palm Sunday foreshadows the coming victory march of our Lord when he conquers death and leads "captivity captive" (Eph. 4:8).

The following three days, Holy Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday are times of preparation for the passion itself. The Church celebrates special matins services on the eve of these days called the "Service of the Bridegroom." They are so called because they announce the coming again of the Bridegroom, the Son of Man, who returns "as a thief in the night" (2 Peter 3:10). We are reminded that, "blessed is the servant whom he shall find watching." On Holy Monday, we are warned that just as the fig tree withered because it bore no fruit, so we will perish, if we do not abide in the Vine and bear the fruit of the Spirit. Holy Tuesday points to the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, showing us that we must be prepared at all times to meet the Lord. Holy Wednesday's service tells us of the sinful woman who

gave her wealth to Christ by anointing His feet with costly perfume (for His burial) and kisses his feet with great affection, and of that disciple who betrays the Master for money with a deceitful kiss.

On the eve of Holy Thursday there is a service of the sacrament of Holy Unction. This is a healing service for both soul and body. Does not this speak to us of the purpose of Christ's Holy Passion? For "with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).

The events immediately preceding Holy Pascha are commemorated as follows: 1) The Last Supper is remembered at the Divine Liturgy on Holy Thursday morning. 2) The Lord being taken by unlawful men, falsely accused, tortured and crucified is remembered at the 12 Gospel readings on Thursday Evening. At Holy Friday Vespers (4:00 p.m.) we remove the burial shroud of Christ from the Altar (the place of sacrifice) and take it to the tomb. Christ's burial and decent into hell is graphically described at the Matins service in which we process around the Church with the Shroud (7:00 p.m. Friday night). And while Christ rests in the tomb on the most Blessed of Sabbaths, at the Vespers Liturgy on Saturday (10:00 a.m.) the Resurrection is already anticipated by the 15 Old Testaments prophecies that are read and the changing of the covers from purple to white.

Finally, we arrive at the most blessed of all events, the feasts of feasts, the celebration of celebrations, to the Paschal service itself where we can sing with joy in our heart, "Christ is Risen from the dead, trampling down death by death and upon those in the tombs bestowing life." (Beginning Saturday at 11:30 p.m.)

RECEIVING COMMUNION ON PASCHA

Every Orthodox Christian, must make every effort, if physically able to prepare themselves for partaking of Holy Communion on Holy Pascha. All Orthodox are invited to receive communion on Holy Pascha, providing that they have either gone to confession and received Holy Communion from Lazarus Saturday on, or they have gone to confession during Great Lent and have partaken of Holy Communion every Sunday following their confession. Of course, one should also prepares oneself with prayer and fasting. No confessions will be heard after Holy Saturday Liturgy, except in the case of extreme emergency.

FROM THE FATHERS

God belongs to all free beings. He is the life of all, the salvation of all - faithful and unfaithful, just and unjust, pious and impious, passionate and dispassionate, monks and laymen, wise and simple, healthy and sick, young and old - just as the effusion of light, the sight of the sun, and the changes of the seasons are for all alike; 'for there is no respect of person with God.' †

Let us charge into the good fight with joy and love without being afraid of our enemies. Though unseen themselves, they can look at the face of our soul, and if they see it altered by fear, they take up arms against us all the more fiercely. For the cunning creatures have observed that we are scared. So let us take up arms against them courageously. No one will fight with a resolute fighter. †

"The beginning and sum of the passions is unholy self-esteem. A vainglorious person want to please not God but men. The fast of a vainglorious person is without reward and his prayer futile, because he does both for the praise of men." †

God judges our intention, but in that which is within our power He, in man-befriending-wise, also requires us to act. Great is he who leaves undone nothing that is within his power; but greater is he who humbly attempts what is beyond his power. †

ST. JOHN CLIMACUS, THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT



"NO ONE SPOKE TO ME ... THAT'S THE COLDEST CHURCH I WAS EVER IN"

HOMILY ~About that awesome stone – *The Stone which the builders rejected...* "Everyone who falls on that stone will be smashed to pieces" (St. Luke 20:18).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the cornerstone. Judas fell on that stone and was smashed. Herod fell on that stone and he was smashed. Julian the Apostate fell on that stone and he was smashed. Arius fell on that stone and he was smashed. The deniers and scoffers of Christ fell on that stone and were smashed as clay pots of a potter.

This stone fell on Sodom and Gomorrah and Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. This stone fell on Egypt and Egypt was destroyed. This stone fell on Jerusalem and Jerusalem was destroyed. This stone fell on the Jewish people and the Jewish people were scattered into pieces. This stone fell on many sinful generations and empires and those sinful generations and empires fell apart into dust and ashes.

The Lord forgave sinners seventy times seven but beyond that if sinners remain sinners, will the Lord save them against their will? He will not, for that is not the principle for the salvation of men. The principle of salvation is that men voluntarily consent to salvation on the part of God. If men seventy times seven and more do not desire to be saved by God, then God will not save them. Then men will be smashed against that Stone around which they cannot pass and are destroyed by that Stone, which they have raised to cast far away from themselves. Can it be said that God is unmerciful, Who saved the penitent thief on the Cross? Can it be said that He is unjust when He handed over the thief to destruction who mocked Him even in the last hour of death? *O Lord Almighty, save us!*

~ From the Prologue of St. Nikolai

HOMILY~ *Who is Christ?*

"Who do people say that I am?" (St. Mark 8:27).

Brethren, it is almost two-thousand years from that day when our Lord Jesus posed this question to His Disciples. From then until today, this question is put to every generation of man, every bright day and every dark night: And every generation of man and every bright day and every dark night had to give an answer to this question. This question is the question of life or death and the answer to it is life-bearing or death-bearing. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (St. Matthew 16:16), the Apostle Peter responded. And that reply was approved and praised by the Lord Jesus.

"Who is Christ?" men say today. Some say, along with the Jews, that He is the destroyer of the Law and the self-styled Messiah. Others say, along with Pilate, that they in general cannot arrive at the truth about this man. The third say, along with the Apostles, that He is Christ, the Son of the Living God, Savior, Redeemer of the human race from sin and death, the Resurrected and the Resurrector, the Living-One and the Life-giver. And all of us who are baptized in the Name of the Holy Trinity agree with the Apostles and the One, Holy, Apostolic Church which, with her universal voice, thus confesses Christ the Lord.

O Lord, Only-begotten Son of God, help us, that we may, all the days of our life, believe in Thee in our hearts and confess Thee with our lips as our God and our Savior "as the power of God and the wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:24). To Thee be glory and thanks always. Amen.

Tasks Unfinished

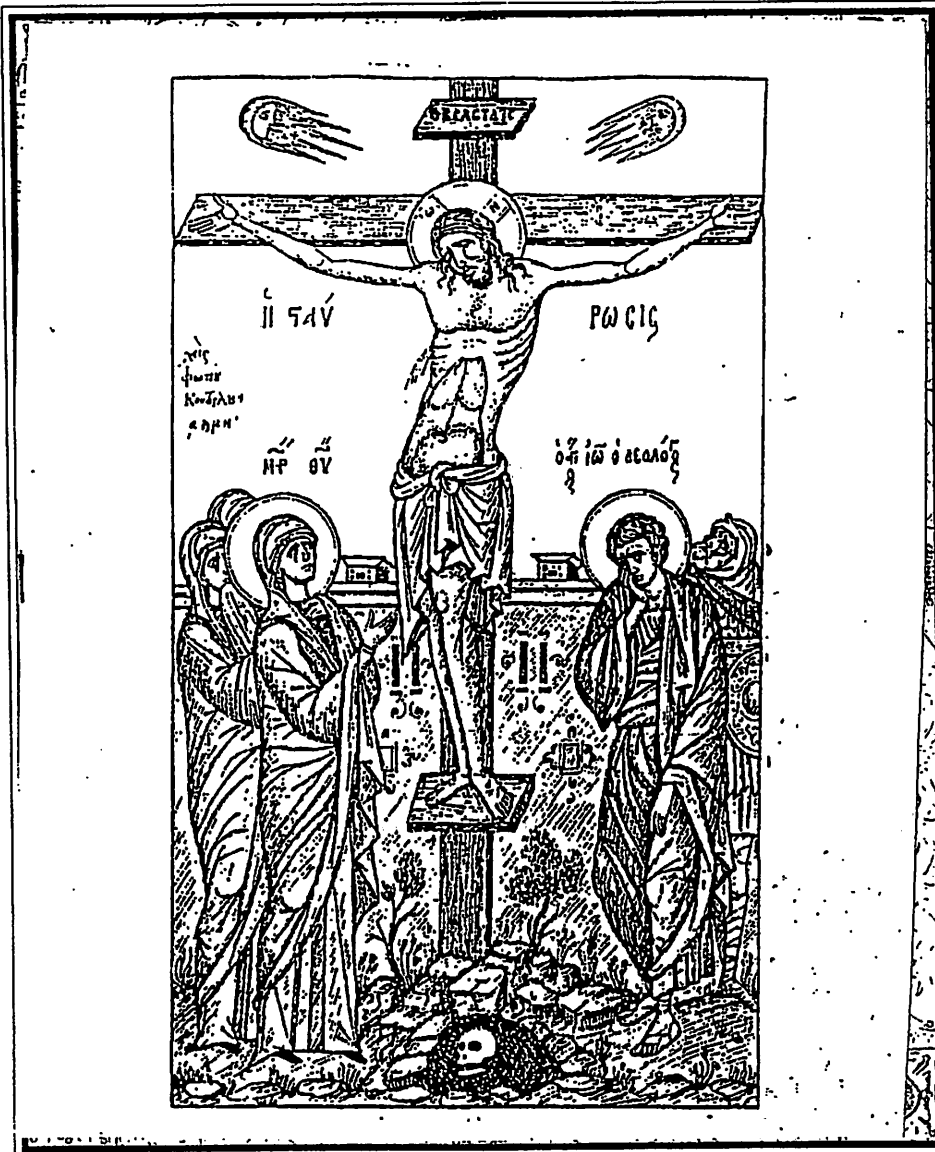
⊗ "We leave our tasks unfinished because of our negligence or debility, for we do not carry out the work of God diligently and do not regard it as our main task; on the contrary, we disdain it as a kind of incidental chore. Because of this we fail to prosper, or indeed often regress, like those others who 'turned back' and no longer followed Jesus (cf. Jn. 6:66). And yet what Jesus said was nothing harsh, as they thought, for he was speaking to them about doctrine. None the less, where a resolute disposition and desire are lacking, even easy things appear difficult – though the reverse is true as well."

St. Peter of Damascus

Holy Week

Our Final Journey To Pascha

On Palm Sunday, as we begin our entry into Holy Week, it is only proper that we consider the past forty days of Great Lent. (The forty days are technically considered to have ended on the day before Lazarus Saturday, which forms a kind of bridge into Holy Week). What does it mean when we sing during the Pre-sanctified Liturgy on the eve of Lazarus Saturday that we have "completed the forty days which bring profit to our soul?" Forty days symbolizes a number of things: 1) The forty years which Israel spent in the desert after having fled from Egypt and while journeying towards the Promised Land; 2) Moses' forty day fast on Mt. Sinai when he waited for God to give him the Law (Ex. 24:18); 3) Elijah's forty day fast on Mt. Horeb prior to seeing God; 4) Christ's forty day fast in the desert after His baptism (Mt. 4:2). Great Lent is that time when we increase our efforts of fasting, prayer, repentance, and virtue in order to leave behind us all sin. Like Israel we leave the Egypt of sin and for forty days we purify ourselves so that we may be worthy to arrive at the Promised Land of Christ's Resurrection. Now that we come to Holy Week our efforts must intensify even more, so that we may enter the gates of Jerusalem with Christ carrying the Palms of Victory. In a word, the more deeply we meditate upon the meaning of this Holy season, the more we see that we are called not merely to be



observers of Holy Week, but rather to *participate* in it through our spiritual life in Christ.

PALM SUNDAY

Palm Sunday is one of the most joyous days of the Fast. As the New Israel we cry aloud with the prophet Zechariah as we see Christ entering Jerusalem, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion..." (Lord I Call, Vespers). Today we are filled with joy because the Messiah comes to deliver each of us from the sin which daily oppresses us. For this joy to be real, however, we must be like the innocent children seen in the icon of the Feast,

themes and melodies of Lent. "Passing from one divine Feast to another, from palms and branches let us now make haste, ye faithful, to the solemn and saving celebration of Christ's Passion" (Vespers Aposticha). Spiritually we travel into Jerusalem, which is meant to be that city from which the Kingdom of God will be ruled, and then we travel to the Temple where the King's throne is to be found. As Christ comes meekly riding on a donkey, we must be aware that He has come to claim that Kingship which is rightfully His. Further, in this coming week we must show that we are citizens of this Royal City and subjects of its King.

otherwise we risk becoming like the Pharisees, who also awaited the Messiah, but who reacted viciously against Christ when they heard His message. As St. Paul says in the Epistle on this day, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure... let your mind dwell on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

HOLY MONDAY THROUGH HOLY WEDNESDAY



A Hymn of St. Ephraim the Syrian

I fall in adoration at Thy feet, O Lord!
I thank Thee, God of goodness!
O God of holiness, I invoke Thee,
on my knees, in Thy sight.

For me, an unworthy sinner,
Thou hast willed to undergo the death of the Cross,
setting me free from the bonds of evil.

What shall I offer in return for Thy generosity?

Glory to Thee, Friend of men!
Glory to Thee, O most merciful!
Glory to Thee, most patient!
Glory to Thee Who forgives sin!
Glory to Thee Who has come to save us!
Glory to Thee Who has been made man in the womb of a Virgin!

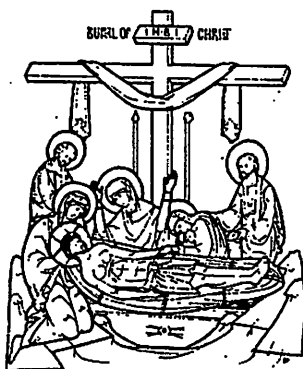
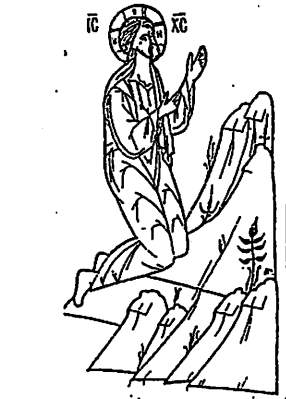
Glory to Thee Who has been bound!
Glory to Thee Who has been scourged!
Glory to Thee Who has been derided!
Glory to Thee Who has been nailed to the Cross!
Glory to Thee, laid in a sepulcher, but risen again!
Glory to Thee Who has preached the Gospel to men and have been
believed!

Glory to Thee Who has ascended to Heaven!
Glory to Thee, seated at the right hand of the Father
and Who will return with Him, in majesty, among the angels,
to judge those who have disregarded Thy Passion!

The powers of Heaven will be shaken!
All the angels and archangels, the cherubim and seraphim
will appear in fear and trembling before Thy glory!
The foundations of the earth will quake
and all that has life will cry out before Thy majesty!

In that hour let Thy hand draw me beneath Thy wings,
and save me from the terrible fire, from the gnashing of teeth,
from the outer darkness and from despair without end.

That I may sing to Thy glory:
Glory to Him who through His merciful goodness
has designed to redeem this sinner!



✘ Accordingly, to call the nations to the grace of His Resurrection – which is the rich and fertile land that bears everlasting fruits, fruits a hundredfold and sixty-fold – He bowed His shoulder to labor, bowed Himself to the Cross, to carry our sins. For that reason the Prophet (Isaiah) says, "Whose government is on His shoulder." This means, above the Passion of His body is the power of His Divinity, or it refers to the Cross that towers above His body. Therefore He bowed His shoulder, applying Himself to the plow – patient in the endurance of all insults, and so subject to affliction that He was wounded on account of our iniquities and weakened on account of our sins.

St. Ambrose of Milan