

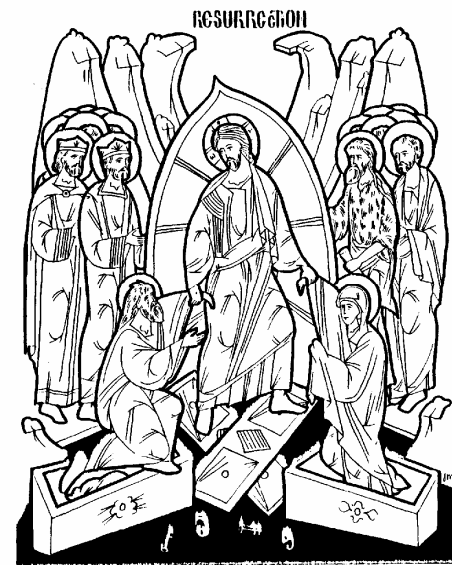
This guide is simply meant to help young people of GOYAn age to understand and appreciate a bit more the wonderful, meaningful, and living services of the Greek Orthodox Church during Holy Week. Much of the structure of this pamphlet and many of the ideas under the headline “*themes*” were taken from the following sources (particularly from the first source):

Calivas, Fr. Alkiviadis C. Great Week and Pascha in the Greek Orthodox Church. Holy Cross Orthodox Press (Brookline, MA), 1996.

Wybrew, Hugh. Orthodox Lent, Holy Week, and Easter: Liturgical Texts with Commentary. St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press (Crestwood, NY), 1997.

This guide was written by Nicolaos H. Kotsis – Diocese of Detroit
Director of Youth & Young Adult Ministries – Spring 2001

A Simple Guide to Holy Week in the Greek Orthodox Church



Finally, the universality of the Gospel is stressed by the fact that it is usually read in several different languages. The Word of the bible is also known as the Good News because we hear and read about all that Christ has done to save our souls from death. That Good News is meant for EVERYONE IN THE WORLD! No one is excluded. God loves each and every one of us so much that He gave His Son Jesus Christ up to death so that we could all be drawn towards Him in Heaven through Christ's Resurrection.

Why this is important to you:

You get a new chance; a fresh start. All of creation has been renewed and reborn because of Jesus Christ. Death no longer holds us captive. The Kingdom of Heaven – Paradise – has been opened wide for you and for everyone else on earth. Don't you want to enter ?



Christ destroyed death and has given us a taste of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Why this is important to you:

You now have the chance of having all of your sins forgiven, entering the Kingdom of Heaven to be with Jesus Christ, and becoming like Him. Death cannot hold anyone back anymore!

Easter Sunday afternoon

Sometime late on Easter Sunday or in the afternoon hours, we celebrate the Vespers of Pascha, also known as the Agape service. It is a Vespers centered upon the message of Pascha – the risen Jesus Christ. The gospel lesson is about the appearances of Jesus after His resurrection. This lesson is usually read in several languages. The Christos Anesti is also sung many times throughout the service. Another powerful hymn that is sung says, “Who is so great a God as our God? For You are the God, Who alone works wonders.”

Themes: Victory over death, praise of our God Who alone does wondrous things, and the universality of the Gospel

There is no greater joy in our Church other than the fact that *we* are all saved from death because of *Jesus*’ victory over it. Furthermore, our God, the Trinitarian God, God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, alone works wonders and miracles. As Orthodox Christians, no one else in the world can work a miracle other than our God. He is the only source of Light, of Wisdom, of all that is Good – no one else or nothing else is.

Introduction

This pamphlet was created to help you gain a better understanding of the worship services celebrated during Holy Week. It is also intended to give you a deeper appreciation for the impact these services have on our daily lives.

First of all, some words need definition:

Orthros: This is a worship service that can be held every morning in the church. In general, an *Orthros* contains readings from the Psalms, a list of the saints or events remembered on that day, petitions of the priest as we pray to God to keep us safe, healthy, on the right path, and for peace in the world, and a reading from the Gospel. It also contains many hymns associated with the saint(s) remembered that day, hymns associated with a particular day of the week or time of year, and hymns associated with a certain type of musical tone. There are 8 types of tones in our tradition, and each week we sing in a particular tone – say the 1st tone. The next week, we sing in the 2nd tone, etc. If you are a musician or play in a band or orchestra, think of a tone as say, playing a song in the key of D major, or B minor.

If you ever get to church (at most churches) before the start of the Divine Liturgy on a Sunday, you will hear the *Orthros* being sung. The *Orthros* ends with a *Doxology*, or a hymn of praise and glory.

Vespers: This is a worship service that can be held every evening in the church. However, in most parishes, we only celebrate a *Vesper* service on the day before the feast day of the church (for example, if you go to a church named St.

though the hymns and Gospel Lesson speak describe the resurrection, we still have to wait until midnight before we can truly celebrate it.

Holy Saturday night

Around 11:00 pm, we begin the Orthros for Pascha. The hymns are completely joyful as they describe Christ destroying death by dying Himself.

After that service is completed, as many lights as possible are turned off in the church. At that point, the priest comes out with a lit candle and proceeds to light the candles of the people. He does this while singing “Come, receive the light from the unwaning light, and glorify Christ, Who has risen from the dead.” This begins the Midnight Service, or Resurrection Service. Then the priest, accompanied by the altar boys and choir, proceeds down the center aisle to a place in the narthex or outside of the Church. It is at that point where the priest reads the resurrectional gospel reading (Mark 16:1-8). After the priest is done reading, the *Christos Anesti* (Christ is Risen) hymn is sung for the first time. After a series of petitions is prayed by the priest and the people, the priest goes back to the altar as the choir sings the remaining hymns of the Resurrection Service.

When the Resurrection Service is completed, the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom begins.

Themes: *Christ triumph over death and His Resurrection*

There is no other service in the Church filled that is filled with as much hope, renewal, and joy as the Resurrection Service. All of creation is renewed and death is abolished.

Why this is important to you:

If you think of a tomb, you probably think of death and the frailty of life. However, Christ's tomb is actually life-giving! It is life-giving because through His tomb, Christ entered into Hades and broke its gates. By doing that, He freed each and every one of us from the bonds and slavery of death. Through His tomb, each one of us can enter into His Kingdom. Before Christ's tomb, we had no way of escaping death and no way of experiencing the Kingdom of Heaven. He died for us so this could all happen. That is how much Christ loves *each* of us.

Holy Saturday morning

This service starts off with a Vespers and then moves into the Liturgy of St. Basil. During the Vespers, a number of prophecies from the Old Testament are read. After the prophecies, the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil begins. After the epistle reading, the priest scatters bay leaves around the church as a sign of Christ's victory over death. After that, the lesson from the gospel is read and the Liturgy continues as usual.

Theme: Christ's resurrection

All of the hymns during this service are paschal, or resurrectional in nature. We have eagerly awaited the moment of His resurrection, and during this service, we get a foretaste of the tremendous joy of that moment. The odd thing is that this is done so early on Saturday. This is because this Liturgy used to be a part of a long Paschal vigil that started late in the afternoon and which lasted towards midnight. Now, however, the service has been pushed back to the morning. So even

Nicholas, the church's feast day is December 6. The church would celebrate a *Vesper* service on December 5th in the evening). Sometimes parishes have *Vesper* services before major feast days (like Christmas) or sometimes on Saturday evenings.

A *Vesper* service contains a reading from the psalms, petitions of the priest as we pray to God to keep us safe, healthy, on the right path, and for peace in the world, and sometimes a reading or readings from the Old Testament. There are also many hymns that are sung during a *Vesper* service. They have to do with the saint or event remembered on that particular day, hymns associated with a particular day of the week or time of the year, and hymns associated with a particular musical tone (like in the *Orthros*).

Usually, we think of a *Vespers* as starting off a new day, even though it takes place at night. In other words, when we come together to church for a *Vesper* service, we are really remembering or celebrating something that will take place tomorrow - the next day.

During Holy Week, things change a bit. Normally, we think of an *Orthros* taking place in the morning and a *Vespers* at night. During Holy Week, however, the reverse happens – the *Vespers* takes place in the morning and the *Orthros* at night. For example, the first service after the Divine Liturgy on Palm Sunday that we celebrate during Holy Week is on Sunday night. Instead of being a *Vesper* service, technically, it is the *Orthros* for Holy Monday. We mention this so you know what the real order of services is during Holy Week. However, in this pamphlet, things will be simplified to eliminate any confusion.

Lazarus Saturday – the Saturday before Palm Sunday

We begin talking about Holy Week from Lazarus Saturday because this great event foreshadows the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

On Lazarus Saturday, the Church celebrates a Divine Liturgy. On this day, we remember the last and greatest of Jesus' signs and miracles before His own death, burial and resurrection. Lazarus was a close friend of Jesus. Lazarus died and Jesus arrived at his home (which was just outside of Jerusalem) 4 days after his death. By that time, Lazarus had already been buried in a tomb and his body had started to decompose. When Jesus heard about Lazarus' death, He cried because He lost His good friend. Nevertheless, Jesus went to the tomb, had the stone removed from the entrance, and said "Lazarus come forth!" At that point, Lazarus was resurrected from the dead and came out of the tomb, even though he was still wrapped in the burial cloth. (John. 11:1-46)

Themes: *Christ and everyone's death, burial and resurrection - the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ*

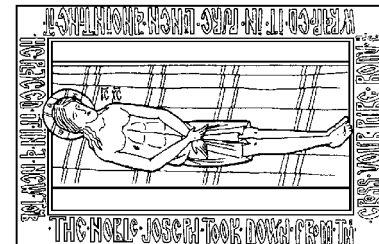
This most powerful miracle foreshadows what Christ will have to go through once he goes to Jerusalem. Christ will also die, be buried, and will resurrect. Each one of us will also die, be buried, and be resurrected at the second coming of Christ. That is why the Church celebrates this great feast day right before Holy Week. Also, in the Bible, Jesus performs this miracle just before He enters Jerusalem – what we know as Palm Sunday. This miracle makes the religious leaders in Jerusalem so angry and jealous, that they started to plot against Jesus – a theme we will return to later in Holy Week.

Good Friday evening

This service is really the Orthros for Holy Saturday. It is also called the Lamentations. It is basically set up as a typical Orthros. However, more than 50 verses of hymns are added. We call these hymns the lamentations. These are sung when the priest is on the solea in front of the Epitaphios. During one of the hymns, the priest sprinkles the Epitaphios, and then the people, with rose-water, symbolizing the actions of the myrrh-bearing women. He starts sprinkling the rose-water after the verse: "The myrrh-bearing women came very early in the morning and sprinkled the tomb with myrrh." Following the lamentations are other hymns based on the acts of the myrrh-bearing women, Christ's entombment, and His descent into Hades. Shortly after that, there is the procession of the Epitaphios around the church. When the procession is over there is a reading from the prophecies, and an epistle and gospel reading.

Themes: *Christ's descent into Hades and the tomb as life-giving*

The kouvouklion symbolizes Christ's tomb. Upon His death, Christ did not simply remain in the tomb. In fact, he descended into Hades, broke the bonds of death, and freed the people who were tied-down in Hades. In fact, the procession of the Epitaphios symbolizes Christ journey into Hades.



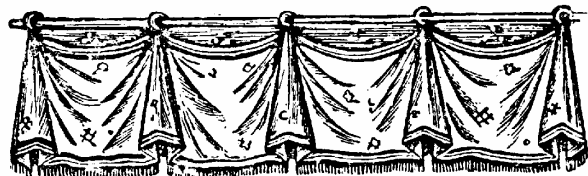
wrapped in a white cloth, which symbolizes His burial garment. Also, the priest processes with the Epitaphios. The Epitaphios is the icon that is placed in the beautifully decorated wooden tomb. The Epitaphios is NOT the wooden tomb that is decorated with all of the flowers. The priest places the Epitaphios in the kouvouklion at the end of the procession.

Theme: *salvation granted to us through His “awful Passion, the Cross, and condescension to voluntary entombment in the flesh*

As we learned from earlier in Holy Week, Jesus Christ, though He is God, lowered Himself to our level. That means He lived like we do in every way. He felt pain, sorrow, joy, temptation – the same things we all feel. The only difference is that He is sinless. If He did not die, He could not have truly been like we are. So, He is God, but chooses to allow Himself to be sacrificed so that everyone can attain the Kingdom of Heaven. *In other words, He came down to our level to try and raise us up to His level.*

Why this is important to you:

Jesus Christ loves you so much, that He died for you. He lowered Himself to the level of us humans so that He could raise us up to the level of the Kingdom of heaven. Through His death and resurrection, we can live eternally!



Furthermore, this miracle signifies something very special about Jesus Christ, our Lord, King, and God. It shows that He is truly Human and truly God. He is truly Human because he is saddened by Lazarus' death. In fact, he is so saddened, that He even cries. At the same time, we can see His great power and authority as God because He is able to make Lazarus rise from the dead.

Why this is important to you:

This is so important to you because we realize that even though we will someday die, we have the hope that through Jesus Christ we will rise again and enter the Kingdom of Heaven. This happens because Jesus was just like you – He was a human being, He felt pain, sorry, joy, anguish, and even temptation. The thing that is different is that He did not sin. Because He was born on earth as a human being and because He is sinless, we are all able to join Him in the Kingdom of Heaven. This ultimate hope is important for us to remember in our own lives and even when we grieve for the loss of loved ones.



Palm Sunday – the Sunday before Pascha (Easter)

On this day, we celebrate the triumphant entrance of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem upon a colt (John 12:1-18). While Jesus was entering the city, the people threw palm branches and articles of clothing on the road in front of Him as sign that they understood Jesus to be their Lord, King, and God (Luke 19:28-40). The church is often decorated with palm branches on the icons or in particular areas of the church. Some of the palms are made into crosses that the priest distributes at the end of the service. The priest blesses the palm crosses and branches usually at the end of the Divine Liturgy. Therefore, when you take your palms home, please remember that they were blessed in the church, and you should take care not to treat them improperly or to discard them inappropriately.

***Themes:** Christ as King, Christ as God in the flesh – or God as Man, the Kingdom is Christ and He is present in our lives, the King as a suffering servant*

On Palm Sunday, we realize, as did the faithful people who greeted him with palm branches in Jerusalem, that Christ is the King of all – the King of Kings. We accept Him as our Lord. We realize also that while He is God, He is at the same time Man. This is vitally important because in order to save us from death, Christ had to be born as a human being and undergo everything all of us undergo – including death. But rising from the dead as the God-Man, he gives all of us the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Christ also sent the Holy Spirit to us after His ascension into Heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father. The Holy Spirit interacts with us on a daily basis as a helper and guide. In fact, we call upon the Holy Spirit all of the time to sanctify our lives. The communion is consecrated by the Holy Spirit, God's love for us is communicated to us through the Holy Spirit – our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit lives and abides in us. If that is the case, then our bodies become the temple of the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 6:19. Therefore, we have to be very careful about how we treat our bodies. We must keep from defiling our bodies by taking drugs, practicing improper sexual activity, etc. If we can do this, we are following in the footsteps of Christ and we are preparing ourselves for the Kingdom of Heaven. The place we can now go to because Christ died, was buried, and resurrected for our sins.



It is customary that the Kouvouklion, the wooden tomb of Christ, is decorated after the service of the Great Hours. The Epitaphios is the icon that is placed inside of the Kouvouklion.

Good Friday afternoon

This is the Vespers of Good Friday. It is also called the Apokathelosis – or “taking down from the cross.” We remember that at this time, Christ “gave up His Spirit.” During the service, the icon of Christ is taken down from the cross and

Good Friday Morning

This service is actually a group of services put together in one form. These services are called the Great Hours, or Royal Hours. On Good Friday morning, the 1st, 3rd, 6th, and 9th hours are combined into this one service. There are a number of Psalms and prophecies, an epistle and gospel lesson, and hymns associated with Great Friday which are sung or read during this service.

Themes: each hour has its own particular theme

1st Hour – The theme here is Christ as the true light. As the True Light, He “illumines and sanctifies every man who comes into the world.” During this service we pray that “the Light of [His] Countenance leave [s] its mark on us.”

3rd Hour – The theme of the 3rd hour is the descent of the Holy Spirit. After Christ ascended into Heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to us to be our Helper and Comforter.

6th Hour – The focus is the passion and crucifixion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

9th Hour – We remember the death and burial of Creator of the universe.

Why this is important to you:

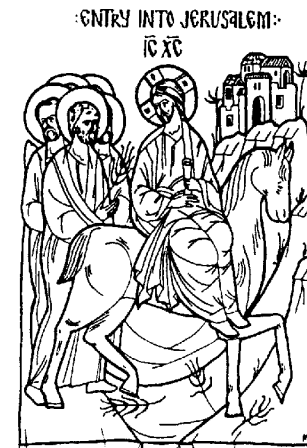
Christ is the Light we need to follow so that we can escape from the darkness. By understanding His Gospel, His Word, the Light of His face will awaken our minds to keep us on the right path and out of the errors of sin.

Why this is important to you:

Think about it: God was present on this earth as one of us – a human being – and He felt pain, joy, sorrow, and even death. But because He rose from the dead, all of us have the same hope – to have eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven. Even more, *because Jesus became like us, a human being, He makes us able to become like Him: we are able to become God-like.* Our status as human beings has been raised to a level *unattainable by anything else in creation* – we can become *like* God.

An important hymn sung on Palm Sunday is the following:

“Before your voluntary Passion, Christ our God, You have given to all men an assurance of the general resurrection; for at Bethany You raised by Your almighty power Lazarus, who was dead for four days, and as Giver of Light, O Savior, You have made the blind to see. With Your disciples you entered the Holy City, seated upon the colt of a donkey as though upon the cherubim, and so You have fulfilled the preaching of the prophets. The children of the Hebrews came with palm branches to meet You. Therefore, we also, bearing palms and love branches, cry aloud to You in thanksgiving: Hosanna in the highest; blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord.”



Palm Sunday Night

The service held on the night of Palm Sunday is called a “Bridegroom Service.” Technically, it is really the Orthros for Monday morning, but in most Holy Week books in this country, you’ll see the service under the title, “Palm Sunday Evening.” In your parish, the services held on the evenings of Sunday, Monday and Tuesday of Holy Week are all called “Bridegroom Services.” This is to signify that Christ is wedded to the Church. All of these services have the common theme of Christ wedded to the Church and of signifying and reminding us of the second coming of Christ.

Themes: *Joseph, the son of Jacob, who prefigures Christ, and the cursing of the fig tree.*

Joseph was one of the many sons of Jacob. His brothers were jealous of him and plotted to kill him. However, they decided to sell him to a group of traders who were headed for Egypt. The Lord was with Joseph, and in Egypt he prospered and held a very high position – close to the Pharaoh. In the end, he saved his brothers and the Israelites from starvation because of his position in Egypt, which God had bestowed upon him. This is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. We sometimes say, Joseph pre-figured Christ. This is because as Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and countrymen, Christ was also betrayed by those close to Him and by His own people. Nevertheless, good came out of it because Joseph ended up saving his people, the Israelites, just as Christ saved all of mankind by dying and resurrecting.

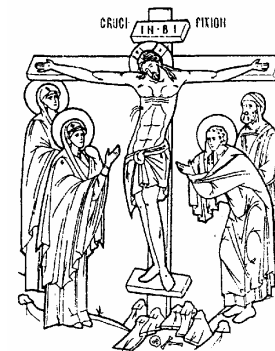
The cursing of the fig tree is from Matthew 21:18-22 and is part of the Gospel reading on this day. Jesus was walking and saw a fig-tree that had no fruit on it. Jesus was angry that it did not have fruit and He cursed it saying, “Let no fruit grow on you ever again.” Then the tree withered and died. This passage symbolizes the unfaithful who do not understand Jesus Christ as God and who do not “bear good fruit.”

After the fifth gospel reading, the icon of the crucified Christ is processed around the church. In one of the most important hymns of our Church, we hear:

“Today is hung upon the Cross He Who suspended the earth amid the waters. A crown of thorns crowns Him, Who is the King of Angels. He, Who wrapped the Heavens in clouds, is clothed with the purple of mockery. He, Who freed Adam in the Jordan, received buffetings. He was transfixed with nails, Who is the Bridegroom of the Church. He was pierced with a lance, Who is the Son of the Virgin. We worship Your Passion, O Christ. Show us also, Your glorious Resurrection.”

Why this is important to you:

After reading that hymn above, we understand the universal and cosmic importance of what happened. ***The Creator of all things, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who was born on earth as the God-Man, was crucified by us.*** Yet, His ultimate love for humanity and the entire universe led Him to the slaughter so that we might be able to have eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven. We commit sins in our daily lives and we often turn away from the ways of the Lord. However, we now have a chance of being forgiven and becoming *like God* because Christ became *like us* in every way except for being a sinner. We have hope and we also have a second chance to change our lives so that we follow in the path of the Christ.



Two other very important events occur on Holy Thursday morning. First of all, during the Divine Liturgy, the priest prepares the reserve sacrament. The reserve sacrament is Holy Communion that is used only in times of special emergency. For example, if a priest knows someone is very sick or even dying, he may take some of the reserve sacrament and give it to the sick person. This is Holy Communion. The priest keeps the reserve sacrament in the tabernacle on the altar table.

Second, in Constantinople (Istanbul, Turkey), the Ecumenical Patriarch prepares Holy Chrism after this Divine Liturgy. We receive Holy Chrism at our Baptism or at our 'confirmation' if we are converts to Orthodoxy. Holy Chrism "makes us partakers of the Holy Spirit." It allows us to receive the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds. It also allows us to understand, acknowledge, and cultivate the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all of us. The process for making the Holy Chrism takes a long time and involves over 40 different spices and fragrances. For those of us here in the United States who are in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, only the Ecumenical Patriarch can prepare the Holy Chrism, which he then distributes to all of the churches under his jurisdiction.

Holy Thursday night

This is really the Orthros for Great Friday. During this service, we hear the 12 readings from the Gospel. There is also the procession of the icon of the crucified Christ.

Themes: Christ's trial, passion, death, and burial

In the hymns and gospel lessons of this moving service we learn how much Christ loved us and the entire world. He loved us so much that He endured a villainous trial, pain, suffering, and even death to save the world from sin and death.

The first gospel reading describes the Last Supper. The next ten all describe the passion, or sufferings of Christ after Judas betrayed Him. The final Gospel lesson describes an account of His burial and the sealing of His tomb.

Why this is important to you:

This service is so important to each and every one of us because as God's children, Jesus has shown us how to be faithful to His Word and how to be good Christians. He has given us gifts and talents that we need to cultivate so that our faith in Him will grow – so that we will bear spiritual fruit. He gives us the power to fight temptation and peer pressure – He gives us the hope to overcome sorrow and despair – and He gives us the opportunity of entering into His Kingdom. Christ has planted the spiritual seeds in each and every one of us, but we must make the seeds grow so that He doesn't make the tree wither. We can do this by going to Church and receiving communion, loving our neighbors, helping the poor, participating in the sacraments, praying, etc.



Holy Monday Night

Like the service held on the night of Palm Sunday, the service on Holy Monday night is really the Orthros for Holy Tuesday. It is also called a “Bridegroom Service.” The general themes of this service are similar to those of the service on Palm Sunday evening. The icon used is called the “Bridegroom” as you can see on the previous page. It is displayed for veneration at all of the services during the first half of Holy Week. Also, if you notice on these days during Holy Week, the tone is solemn and is even sorrow-full. The Church will probably be dimly lit, the priest will most likely wear purple vestments, and the altar cloth may also be purple – all signs of sorrow.

Themes: *Parable of the 10 Virgins – Alertness/Attentiveness – the Second Coming of Christ – hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees*

On this night, we remember the parable of the 10 virgins. All went to greet the Bridegroom, but they didn’t know when He was coming. Five of the virgins oil for their lamps and five didn’t. While they were waiting, they all fell asleep. Suddenly, the Bridegroom appeared and the 5 who had oil were prepared, but the 5 foolish ones who did not take oil were not prepared. Those 5 foolish virgins, because they were not prepared, were not allowed into the wedding feast. The five wise virgins were prepared and were allowed into the feast.

The parable of the talents is also remembered on this day (a talent is a unit of money). In this parable, three men are told to take care of a certain amount of talents while the master was away. Two of them invested the money and made more. The third hid his money out of fear of the master. In this way, he did not make any money for the master. When the master returned and saw the good the first two had done and how the third had only hid his money, he became very angry that he did not multiply his share of the money. The master took the 3rd man’s money and gave it to one of the others.

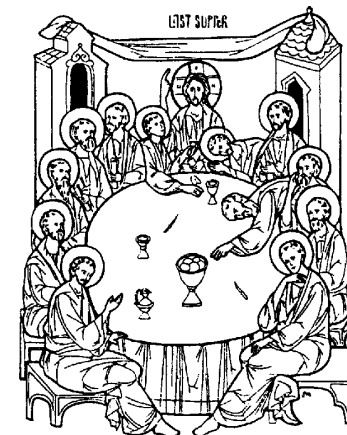
The Gospel lesson on this night primarily deals with the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees- some of the religious leaders at that time. They tried to use legalistic language and arguments to trap Jesus, but they failed. Instead, Christ described them as they really were; selfish people who pretend that they are doing the will

humanity. Nevertheless, His intense and persistent prayer to His Father helped him get through the agony and remain obedient to the will of God.

Why this is important to you:

First and foremost, our sins can be forgiven and our souls can be cleaned by receiving Holy Communion. Jesus gives us a chance to participate in the Kingdom of Heaven by giving us the Eucharist. That means we can have eternal life in a place where there is “no pain, sorrow, or suffering.” Instead, there is only the rich mercy and love of Jesus Christ.

Second, we know that God answers prayers through the description of Christ praying in the garden. The power of prayer is clearly shown there. However, we must learn how to pray. In order to do this, we need to form a relationship with a spiritual father so he can help us learn to pray and draw from the great power that prayer has to offer us.



Holy Thursday morning

Holy Thursday morning begins with the Vesper service followed by the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil.

Themes: *The Last Supper and the Garden of Gethsemane*

At this service, we remember the Last Supper. At the time of the Last Supper, two very important events took place. First of all, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. This is a great show of love towards them and also of humility. Jesus did this to show His service to God and to mankind as well as to teach His disciples how to treat others – to teach them to be humble and servants of the Lord and of mankind.

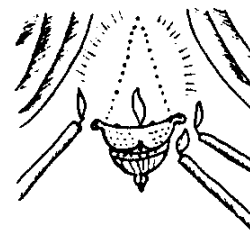
Second, this is the day of the Last Supper – the mystical event initiated by Christ so that we would always be able to receive Him in our body and soul. Christ broke bread and shared wine with His Disciples. We read in Mt. 26:26-28, “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the Disciples and said, ‘Take eat; this is My body.’ Then he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.’” This event gives each of us the greatest opportunity in the world – to participate in the Kingdom of Heaven by taking God into our bodies, which cleanses us from sin.

We also remember the Garden of Gethsemane. Here, we learn about the obedience of Christ to His Father in Heaven, His intense prayer, and His betrayal at the hands of Judas. In terms of prayer, we also learn about its power. How? In the garden, Christ was agonizing. He knew what was going to happen to Him and He was anguishing over it. This shows His

of God and what is right in the eyes of the Lord, when in reality, they are only doing religious things to look pious and faithful in front of other people. They do not focus on God, but on themselves.

Why this is important to you:

Christ is teaching us that we always need to prepare ourselves for the Kingdom of Heaven – at every hour of every day. No one knows when Christ will come again, but when He does, He will come as judge. Life is so very fragile – one moment we are on top of the world, and in the next, we are taken from this world. Perhaps the events of 9/11 have made us understand a little bit better how fragile our lives really are. Like the 5 wise virgins, we have to be alert and attentive to our spiritual lives. We need to cultivate a relationship with God through the Church. We should try to build a relationship with a spiritual father – our parish priest – to help us get on the right path. Furthermore, we must not be like the scribes and Pharisees who were hypocrites. We shouldn’t try to impress people by pretending that we’re religious, or that we are fasting strictly, or that we give more to the poor than others. We must always strive to walk closer to God by obeying His commandments, doing what is pleasing in His sight, and building up our personal relationships with Him. Finally, as the parable of the talents describes, we are all given certain gifts from God. Some of us will be good teachers, others will be musicians, others doctors, others priests, etc. Whatever our own gift is, Christ tells us that we must cultivate it and make it grow. We must use that gift to give glory to God – after all, it is God that gave us our gifts and our talents. When Christ comes at the end of time, He will ask us what we did with the gifts and talents He gave to us. What will your answer be?



Holy Tuesday Night

Like the first two days of Holy Week, the service on this night is really the Orthros of the next day, or the Orthros for Wednesday morning. It is also a “Bridegroom” service, so its general themes are the same as the first two nights. One more main theme of the Bridegroom services is that Christ has come as the suffering servant. He suffers for us in that He went through humiliation, scourging, pain, and even death so that all of us could be saved. He is a servant in that He is the prime example of One Who does things for others – for God and for mankind. To show the other disciples to be servants, Jesus did an amazing thing. He washed their feet. He said:

“You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” John 13:13-17

Themes: *the faithful woman who anointed the head of Jesus with costly oil and the self-serving greed of Judas*

On this day, we remember the woman who used very expensive oil to anoint the head of Jesus (Mt. 26:6-13). Christ says that she did this “For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial.” This was done shortly before Jesus’ passion, or just before He was to suffer for all of mankind. Christ even says, “Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.” Of course, these words are true today. Throughout the world, her gift to Christ has been made known. In fact, on Tuesday night, we hear the Hymn of Kassiani, which describes this *selfless* act of love towards our Lord and

Through the gospel lessons during this service we not only realize the strength of Christ’s healing power, but we learn that Christ has given that power to His Church – to His Disciples. The Disciples have passed that down to every generation of bishops and priests to this very day. Today, Holy Unction is one way we can receive that healing power from Christ.

Why this is important to you:

Jesus told His Disciples that they were to do a number of things once He ascended into heaven. One of those things was to heal those who are sick in body and soul. 2000 years later, we can still be healed of our evil desires and even of our physical illnesses if we call upon our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in faith. Through the sacrament of Holy Unction, we actually participate in this healing process by allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us and cleanse us. This is not just a symbolic act – it is the healing power of Christ actually working to make us better and to help keep us from getting sick.



Holy Wednesday night

On this night, we are able to partake of one of the sacraments of our Church – Holy Unction. Holy Unction is oil that has been consecrated. After it has been consecrated, we can be anointed with it to help cleanse of weaknesses in our spiritual lives as well as help cure us from bodily ailments.

During this service, we also hear 7 epistle and gospel readings. Of the Gospel readings, 6 of them have to do directly with the healing ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus cleansed people possessed by demons, He healed the sick and infirm, and commanded that His disciples do the same. However, this healing ministry is not limited to diseases of the body. It is also meant for diseases of the soul. In the last gospel reading (Mt. 9:9-13), Christ says, “Those who are well are in no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

The only gospel lesson that does not deal directly with the healing ministry of Christ is the 5th lesson – the parable of the 10 Virgins. As we heard on Holy Monday night, this parable was given to us so that we may always be prepared to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, because we will never know when that moment will come. Part of preparing ourselves for the Kingdom is to cleanse ourselves of everything impure in our souls and bodies. Holy Unction is another way we can be healed of diseases of the soul and body and further prepare ourselves for the Kingdom to come.

Themes: *the healing power of Jesus Christ, the healing power passed on to the Disciples, and being prepared for the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Savior Jesus Christ. Even the disciples thought the money she used on the oil would be better used if given to the poor. But Jesus says she did a great thing because we will always have a chance to help the poor around us, but we may not always get the chance of helping Christ Himself

Also, we remember the terrible *selfishness* of Judas, who is plotting to betray Christ for 30 pieces of silver. On the one hand, we have the faith and reverence of the woman towards Christ, who spends a great deal of money on oil to anoint Jesus. On the other hand, we have Judas who was willing to turn over the God-Man to be arrested and ultimately killed.

Why this is important to you:

One of the most important acts of love and kindness we can do as Orthodox Christians, and something that Christ demands of us, is to help the poor. At the same time, it is also proper and important to give in other ways to Christ – to give to His Church. The actual building of the Church is for the glorification of Christ, since He is present there – it is His home. Just as important, in order for the good acts and teachings of the Church to be accomplished, we need to give to the different ministries of the Church. We can be like the woman who anointed the head of Jesus if we think and act in this way. How much would it hurt us if we took a few extra dollars to feed a poor person, or to give it to the Church? How much can this benefit our souls?



Pre-sanctified Liturgy

On the mornings of Holy Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday during Holy Week, your parish may celebrate a Pre-sanctified Liturgy. This type of Liturgy is also celebrated (oftentimes) on Wednesdays and Fridays during Great Lent.

What is it?

A Pre-sanctified Liturgy is a service where the communion, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, has already been consecrated (or made holy). Every Sunday, before the Divine Liturgy begins, the priest prepares the gifts in a place in the altar to the left of the altar table. This place is called the Prothesis. During the service of the Proskomidi, the priest takes the portions out of the prosphoro, blesses them, and places them on the paten. One of the pieces he takes out is called the Lamb. This piece has the Greek letters, "IC XP NI KA" on it. This means Jesus Christ conquers. This is the piece that becomes the Lamb, or the Body of Christ. Normally, the priest only takes out one Lamb. However, if there is going to be a Pre-sanctified Liturgy during the week, he will remove another piece from the prosphoro – another Lamb. Later on, during the Liturgy, the priest calls upon the Holy Spirit to consecrate the bread (Lamb) and wine and to change them into the Body and Blood of Christ. This happens during the part of the service when we are kneeling. Remember, there are two Lambs on the paten at this point – so there are two pieces of the one Body of Christ on the paten on the altar table. After the Lord's prayer, the priest prepares the communion cup. He takes one of the Lambs and puts some of the consecrated wine – the Blood of Christ, on it. This makes it communion. He then takes the portion of the Body and Blood of Christ and places it in the tabernacle on the altar table where it will stay until the Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts. The priest then continues with the other Lamb and prepares the communion for that Sunday.

The Pre-sanctified Liturgy begins as a Vespers with 3 readings from the psalms with petitions in between. After the 3rd set of psalms is read, the cantor chants Psalm 140/141. Several hymns associated with that particular week in Lent or that particular day in Holy week are sung. There is an entrance of the priest with the Gospel book, two more readings from the Old Testament, and during Holy Week, a reading from the Gospel. Then there is a series of petitions for the faithful. That is followed by a series of petitions for catechumens – people studying and preparing to be Christians. After that series of petitions, there is a procession of the Holy Gifts – the priest takes the Pre-sanctified Lamb out of the altar, and then re-enters the altar. During a Divine Liturgy, at this entrance, the priest says "May the Lord our God remember all of you in His Kingdom, now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen." During the entrance of the already-consecrated gifts during the Pre-sanctified Liturgy, the priest only says, "Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us. Amen." This is because the gifts are already the Body and Blood of Christ. Finally, the communion is prepared and the people are able to receive.

Why do celebrate this service instead of a Divine Liturgy?

There are a couple of answers to that question. However, the most important reason is because Great Lent is a solemn time of looking into ourselves spiritually and remembering all that Jesus has done for us. When a Divine Liturgy is celebrated, it is a very joyous occasion. But during the week in Lent (not on Sundays), we are in a sorrowful mindset. Therefore, the Church does not celebrate a Divine Liturgy (unless the Annunciation falls during the week). Instead, the Body and Blood of Christ is prepared on a Sunday and is distributed during the week through the Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts.