

The Entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday)

8 / 21 April

Extracts from the Vigil Service:

Today the grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us together, and we all take up Thy Cross and say: Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

Today the Word and co-eternal Son of God the Father, whose throne is the heaven and whose footstool is the earth, humbles Himself and comes to Bethany, seated on a dumb beast, on a foal. Then the children of the Hebrews, holding branches in their hands, praise Him saying: 'Hosanna in the highest: blessed is He that comes, the King of Israel'.

Let us also come today, all the new Israel, the Church of the Gentiles, and let us cry with the Prophet Zechariah: Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem; for behold, thy King comes unto thee: He is meek and brings salvation, and He rides upon the colt of an ass, the foal of a beast of burden. Keep the feast with the children, and holding branches in your hands sing His praises: Hosanna to the highest; blessed is He that comes, the King of Israel.

1st, 2nd 3rd Stichera of 'Lord, I have cried'

Tropar of The Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem, Tone 1: In confirming the common Resurrection, O Christ God, Thou didst raise up Lazarus from the dead before Thy Passion. Wherefore, we also, like the children bearing the symbols of victory, cry to Thee, O Vanquisher of death: Hosanna in the highest, blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,

Another Tropar of The Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem, Tone 4: As by baptism we were buried with Thee, O Christ our God, so by Thy Resurrection we were deemed worthy of immortal life; and praising Thee, we cry: Hosanna in the highest; blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Kondak of The Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem, Tone 6: Being borne upon a throne in heaven, and upon a colt on the earth, O Christ God. Thou didst accept the praise of the angels and the laudation of the children as they cry to Thee: Blessed is he that cometh to recall Adam.

Vespers: Gen 49:1-2, 8-12; Zeph 3:14-19; Zech 9:9-15

Matins Gospel: Matthew 21:1-11, 15-17

Epistle: Philippians 4:4-9

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

IF THERE IS ANY VIRTUE AND ... ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY—MEDITATE ON THESE THINGS

It is possible to grieve for our own sins and yet to rejoice in Christ. Or when your communion with God is not hindered, rejoice ...Is it best to envy, or to rejoice with one another? Let us search out all these things, and we will find that virtue, like a truly kind mother, places us in safety, while vice is a treacherous thing and full of danger ...That which is 'honourable' belongs to external virtue and that which is 'pure' to the soul ...If we will be at peace with each other, God will be with us ...Therefore we must make a beginning on our part, and then we will draw God towards us ...For he 'who digs a pit for his neighbour, falls into it' (Prov. 26:27) ...As we injure ourselves when we injure our neighbours, so by benefiting them, we benefit ourselves.

St. John Chrysostom. Homily XIV on Philippians IV. B#57, pp. 246, 248, 249.

Gospel - John 12: 1-18

Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always." Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus. The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: "Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! The King of Israel!' Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: "Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, Sitting on a donkey's colt." His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him. Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign.

THE ENTRY OF CHRIST INTO JERUSALEM

Brothers and sisters! So the Holy Church indicates for us spiritual spring. Winter is over. Ended is the state in which our heart was like ice, as if dead in languor, thirsting for Grace. And now, during the past six weeks the sun has been warming us more and more, and nature has gradually started to come back to life. And so our heart too should have come back to life.

Last night during the evening service, we sang, "Children were bearing the sign of Victory . . ." What sign? Pussy willows, branches which had already budded, indicating that spring was coming, as if saying to us: Look here, joy is already beginning, happiness. So through the pussy willows, the Church has been saying to us: This is the beginning for you too; just be Christians, and think it over, and you will begin to see a sign. A sign of what? —that Christ is Risen.

And we, brothers and sisters, we close our eyes like an ostrich who puts his head under his wing. We don't want to think that a limit will come, just as it comes to old people: hands stop working, eyes stop seeing, ears stop hearing—a limit. The end will come. And it seems that in these moments, when we begin to recognize the approach of old age, we involuntarily compare it with winter, with snow. Yes, but after winter comes spring. And in a spiritual understanding: after our eyes close, then comes Eternal Life, the joy of Life with Christ. This is what last night's pussy willows were telling us about, "bearing the sign." Abide not in grief; turn to joy. And now comes the moment when the Lord, by a special mystery, through Passion Week which we are approaching, will give us the feeling of this joy of Eternal Life.

Now we worry about a piece of bread, about a roof over our heads, about our social conditions. And it seems to us that the meaning of life consists of this. But the Church says, Look at the pussy willows: leaves will sprout and later flowers and fruit. So it is even in a Christian soul. Everything we are busying ourselves with, all this will remain here. But with us there will go another stream of life—spiritual life. You should think about this. But is it so? Maybe it's not. Brothers, it is so! Today the Holy Church speaks to us through the Apostle. What does the Church say? She says: "Rejoice in the Lord always, (Phil. 4:4). Today, at the conclusion of Great Lent, she says to us, rejoice! Do you have this joy? If this is joy about Eternal Life, then yes, you will have this joy, because Christ is Risen. And all our sicknesses, our old age, our expectancy of death—all of this will dissolve. In what? In Christ. And when the moment of our departure comes (this is how we believe and what the Church says), God Almighty, the Giver of Life, will come to us and will perform for us the mystery of releasing our bonds, and we will enter eternal existence.

"Rejoice," says the Apostle, "and again I say, Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4). See how the Apostle is exhorting us. But what is this? There is a condition: "Let all men know your meekness," (trans. forbearance or moderation in English versions) continues the Apostle. Look here, spring has come to nature. But it will not stop here, it will go further; it will change into summer. And so it is with us—life goes on. "Let all men know your meekness." This means that our life should move in such a way that pride will depart. It should dissolve in Christ's patience, in Christ's meekness. The Apostle says: May your meekness be of the Lord. And further, "Have no anxiety about anything," but be always in prayer. Hear what promises the Lord gives. "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your wishes (trans. requests in English version) be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6). What daring is given to us!

But what kind of wishes should our prayers express? If they are the wishes which people experience in sitting rooms, theatres, worldly amusements—then of course, brothers, the Lord desires something else for us, because all of this will remain here. This senselessness, this commotion, this quarrelling, this adversity, this rage, all this will remain here. And only joy will depart with us. This is joy: if you wish for meekness, humility, prosperity, brotherly love, Christian living, quiet—then pray! The Lord will be with you. Rejoice! The Holy Day is approaching. Tomorrow there will come great moments when the Sacrament is being performed. And so in our hearts will be revealed this joy: Christ is Risen! May this joy abide with us in a joyous feeling of Eternal Life.

Let us hasten, O believers, moving from one divine festival to another; from palms and branches to the fulfillment of the august and saving sufferings of Christ. Let us watch Him, bearing His sufferings voluntarily for our sake; and let us sing unto Him with worthy praise, crying, O Fountain of mercy, O Haven of Salvation, O Lord, glory to You.

Palm Sunday Evening Vespers.

Palm Sunday.

Commitment to the King (John 12:1-18).

So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him crying, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!'

Great crowds went forth on this day to meet Jesus. They waved palms. Thousands of men and women shouted with joy, "Hosanna, blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord!" They hailed Jesus as King. The news that He had brought Lazarus back from the dead had spread like wildfire. They cast their robes for Him to ride over. They sang. They ran. They strewed the ground before Him with wild flowers.

Today, we, too, shall be given palm branches. For just as Christ entered Jerusalem many years ago, so He will make a triumphant entry into our hearts this Holy Week and Easter when we receive His precious Body and Blood in Holy Communion.

The important thing this Palm Sunday is not that Christ entered Jerusalem many years ago, but that He comes to us today; not how He was received 2,000 years ago on this day, but how He will be received by us.

"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. . . the King of Israel" (John 12:13). When Christ entered Jerusalem He was hailed as a King. When He comes to us today, shall we receive Him as our King? "I am a king," said Jesus, "and to this end was I born, that I should bear witness to the truth."

The King's Appeal.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem he used a method of action which many a prophet of Israel had used before. The prophets had often used the method of dramatic and symbolic action. Men might refuse to listen, but they could hardly fail to see; and again and again the prophets had cast their message into the form of some vivid action, as if to say: "If you will not listen, you can at least see." Jeremiah, for example, forewarned the Jewish people of the slavery that was to fall upon them, by making yokes and wearing them on his neck. Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem on this Palm Sunday was a deliberately made claim on His part to be King. The donkey, for example, on which Jesus rode was the beast on which kings rode when they came in peace; only in war did they ride upon horses. No doubt Jesus was remembering the prophecy of Zechariah which Matthew cites: "Behold your king is coming to you . . . mounted on a donkey." In that triumphant entry into Jerusalem Jesus, in a dramatic, symbolic action which spoke more loudly than any words, was making one last appeal to his people, and saying to them: "Will you not, even now, accept me as your Lord and King, and enthrone me in your mind, your heart and your will?"

"King of the Jews."

Even the inscription on the Cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews" — written in the three great languages of the ancient world: Hebrew, Greek and Latin proclaimed Him King. Each of these three great nations stood for three great contributions to the world: Greece taught the world beauty of form and thought; Rome taught the world law and good government; the Hebrew nation taught the world religion and the worship of the true God. The fulfillment and consummation of all these things is seen in Jesus. In Him was the supreme beauty and the highest thought of God. In Him was the law of God and the Kingdom of God. In Him was the very picture and image of God: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." All the world's seekings and strivings found their fulfillment and consummation in Christ. It was symbolic that in the three great languages of the world men called Him king: "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews!"

Martyrs for the King.

When the aged Bishop Polycarp was brought to trial, the judge stood before him and shouted, "You are to renounce the faith! You are to curse the name of Christ!" St. Polycarp answered, "Fourscore and six years have I served Him, and He never did me wrong: how then can I revile my King, my Savior?" The result was that Bishop Polycarp was burned to death in the amphitheatre in Smyrna. When the young church set down in writing what happened for future generations to know, it wrote: "Polycarp was martyred, Statius Quadratus being proconsul in Asia, and Jesus Christ being King for ever!"

Out of the persecution of Christians by Diocletian has come the story of Genesius, an actor who was playing a part in a burlesque on the rites and customs of the hated Christians. In the midst of the play, as though the Holy Spirit suddenly shamed him for straying from the faith of the Christian home in which he was born, he cried out, "I want to receive the grace of Christ, that I may be born again, and be set free from the sins that have been my ruin!" The surprised crowd saw the mock baptism that was being pantomimed turn into a hallowed moment of conversion as Genesius, fearlessly proclaiming his faith, cried out towards Diocletian, "Illustrious emperor, and all of you who have laughed loudly at this parody, believe me, Christ is the true King!"

Unmoved, except to fury, Diocletian ordered that he first be ripped with claws, then burned with torches, and finally beheaded. Before the end he was heard to cry: "There is no King except Christ, whom I have seen and whom I worship. For Him I will die a thousand times. I am sorry for my sins, and for becoming so late a soldier of the true King."

Not a Mere Symbol.

Someone said once, "Kings? Kings are only something to cheer for." He meant that the human heart loves parades, and that a king was merely a symbol. Christ is not that kind of King — a King we enclose in a decorated church with fragrant incense, stirring hymns and burning candles as if He were dead. He is a living King who says to us today, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." He is a King who challenges, who gives purpose and meaning to life; a King who forgives, strengthens, and heals. "No man ever spoke as this man," they said of Him. "Who is this man that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

He Becomes My King Through Commitment.

Christ becomes King personally and existentially to those who submit to His Kingship through commitment. What do we mean by commitment?

A certain author wrote, "Let us not fool ourselves. We will submit to some master, whether that master is work, sex, pleasure, liquor, or what-have-you. Our problem is to choose which master. The only Master worth serving is Jesus Christ, the Master we were created to serve."

We can be captured by the cheapest and the lowest in life, or we can be captured by the highest and the best that human experience knows: Jesus Christ. He can fulfill life. He can light the lamp no darkness can put out.

When Christ enters our life, we must abandon the throne of our will, our ego, our pride, and allow Him to step up to this royal chair. He will increase; we shall decrease. He will speak; we shall listen. He will command; we shall obey.

Yes, some people will object, but will I not lose my personality if I commit my life to Christ? Does the violin lose its personality when a great master takes it and runs the bow back and forth across its strings? Of course not! It becomes a symphony. Our lives, too, become symphonies when we commit them into the hands of God.

What Makes a Christian.

Fr. John Meyendorff said once in a lecture to Sunday school teachers: "We are told in the Gospels that education implies a positive acceptance of Christ. This is the real conversion. // this marriage does not take place at some time during the life of a Christian, he is simply not a Christian. We have a very clear statement about this in the tradition of the Fathers. What makes a Christian a Christian is this personal commitment to Christ. One's formal belonging to the Church through Baptism and other sacramental participation remains a mere potential if the individual commitment does not take place. The sacramental gifts of Baptism and the Eucharist and of all the sacraments are essential for an objective membership in the body of Christ; but again they are pure potentials if they are not taken seriously, and if a conversion of the heart and mind does not occur at some point in one's life."

When we were baptized, God said to each one of us, "YES, I accept you as my son or daughter." There must come a time in our lives when we must say to Christ, "Yes, Jesus, I accept you as my Savior, my Lord, my King, and I commit my life to You."

Committed Lives.

This is what commitment to Christ meant to former Governor Mark O Hatfield of Oregon, "I could not drift along as I had been doing; going to church because I had always gone. Either Christ was God, and Savior, and Lord, or He wasn't. And if He was, then He had to have all my time, all my devotion, all my life." This is what commitment to Christ should mean to us.

Tolstoy wrote, "I walked deep into the woods one day and there gave my life to the Lord. Suddenly the whole world came alive to me. All was new and different. I have come to the conclusion that God and real life are one and the same thing." Tolstoy discovered real life through commitment to God.

Ignatius Loyola was a soldier in the army of Ferdinand and Isabella in 1521. Severely wounded in a battle, he spent many months convalescing in a castle at Loyola. To help pass the time he asked for some books on romance. None was available, so he was given the lives of Christ and the Saints. These books changed his life. Instead of continuing in the service of an earthly king, he decided to devote his life to the service of his God and seek to win spiritual victories whose fruits would be everlasting. "Take, O Lord!" prayed Ignatius. "Take all — my liberty, my memory, my intellect, my will — all that I am and all that I have. You gave it all to me. I give it back again to You. All of me is Yours. Do with me whatever You will. Give me Your love and Your grace. That is enough for me."

Ignatius founded the Society of Jesus which has given the world many scholars and saints. He wrote a little book "The Spiritual Exercises" which became a classic. He achieved such eminent holiness that the Roman Catholic Church declared him a Saint. His profound influence on the world began with the personal and complete commitment of his life to Jesus as Lord and King!

Fran Tarkenton, Vikings quarterback, said, "My father is a minister and I have always been in and about the church, yet I had never felt that my life had any real direction or power until August, 1958, when I made a complete and all-out dedication of my life to Jesus Christ ... Until that time my faith had largely been something I had inherited. The confrontation with Christ made it alive, personal, powerful. There is quite a difference between a faith you accept from others and a faith you reach out for yourself."

Benefits of Commitment.

Commitment to Christ, says St. Paul, is our response to Christ for what He did for us on the cross: "He died for all that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for Him Who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor. 5:15).

Another benefit of commitment is expressed in Christ's words: "Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall have life everlasting," said Jesus. Not to all but only to those who commit their lives to Him — who live and believe in Him — does God bestow life eternal, life with God. In other words, Christ commits Himself only to those who commit themselves to Him. He cannot commit Himself to someone who does not want Him.

Buffeted by the trials of this world a certain Christian prayed: "Lord, tie me to something eternal. I tie myself to houses and lands and stocks and bonds and by some turn of fate, I lose them. I tie myself to a loved one and a single microbe comes and death snatches her away. I tie myself to a friend and the friendship vanishes. Lord, tie me to Your program, to service in Your Kingdom, to You, God, that I might be tied to the Eternal." Commitment is that which ties us to the Eternal!

If you make Christ your King through commitment, then you are the child of a King. He will let nothing — not even death — snatch you from His hands. He will give you power to be king of yourself and your passions. He will bestow upon you one day the Crown of righteousness. He will grant you life eternal and will make you heir to the greatest kingdom in the universe.

The significance of receiving palms today is to help us renew our commitment to Christ, to salute Him as Lord and King of our lives. May this be for us the meaning of the palms we receive today: a symbol of our personal commitment to Christ as Lord of our lives. For — let us remember — the first commitment was His. He first committed Himself to us, not part of the time or with half a will, but so much so that He went to the cross!

Holy Week: Explanation



Great Lent and Holy Week are two separate fasts, and two separate celebrations. Great Lent ends on Friday of the fifth week (the day before Lazarus Saturday). Holy Week begins immediately thereafter. Let's explore the meaning of each of the solemn days of Passion Week.

Lazarus Saturday: Lazarus Saturday is the day which begins Holy Week. It commemorates the raising of our Lord's friend Lazarus, who had been in the tomb four days. This act confirmed the universal resurrection from the dead that all of us will experience at our Lord's Second Coming. This miracle led many to faith, but it also led to the chief priest's and Pharisees' decision to kill Jesus (John 11:47-57).

Palm Sunday (The Entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem): Our Lord enters Jerusalem and is proclaimed king - but in an earthly sense, as many people of His time were seeking a political Messiah. Our Lord is King, of course, but of a different type - the eternal King prophesied by Zechariah the Prophet. We use palms on this day to show that we too accept Jesus as the true King and Messiah of the Jews, Who we are willing to follow - even to the cross.

Holy Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday: The first thing that must be said about these services, and most of the other services of Holy Week, is that they are "sung" in anticipation. Each service is rotated ahead twelve hours. The evening service, therefore, is actually the service of the next morning, while the morning services of Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday are actually the services of the coming evening.

Understanding that, let's turn to the Services of Holy Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday (celebrated Palm Sunday, Monday and Tuesday evening). The services of these days are known as the Bridegroom Orthros Services. At the first service of Palm Sunday evening, the priest carries the icon of Christ the Bridegroom in procession, and we sing the "Hymn of the Bridegroom." We behold Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church, bearing the marks of His suffering, yet preparing a marriage Feast for us in God's Kingdom.

Each of these Bridegroom Orthros services has a particular theme. On Holy Monday, the Blessed Joseph, the son of Jacob the Patriarch, is commemorated. Joseph is often seen as a Type of Christ. Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, thrown into a pit, and sold into slavery by them. In the same way, our Lord was rejected, betrayed by His own, and sold into the slavery of death. The Gospel reading for the day is about the barren fig tree, which Christ cursed and withered because it bore no fruit. The fig tree is a parable of those who have heard God's word, but who fail to bear the fruit of obedience. Originally the withering of the fig tree was a testimony against those Jews who rejected God's word and His Messiah. However, it is also a warning to all people, in all times, of the importance of not only hearing the God's word, but putting it into action.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins is read on Holy Tuesday. It tells the story of the five virgins who filled their lamps in preparation for receiving the bridegroom while the other five allowed their lamps to go out, and hence were shut out of the marriage feast. This parable is a warning that we must always be prepared to receive our Lord when He comes again. The theme of the day is reinforced by the expostulation hymn we sing: "I see Thy Bridal Chamber adorned, O my Savior, but have no wedding garment that I may enter. O Giver of Light, enlighten the vesture of my soul, and save me." The theme of Holy Wednesday is repentance and forgiveness. We remember the sinful woman, Kassiane, who anointed our Lord in anticipation of His death. Her repentance and love of Christ is the theme of the wonderful "Hymn of Kassiane" which is chanted on this night, reminding us one more time, before "it is too late," that we too may be forgiven if we repent.

Holy Unction: The Mystery or Sacrament of Holy Unction is celebrated on Holy Wednesday evening. Actually this service can be celebrated any time during the year, especially when one is ill. However, because of our need for forgiveness and spiritual healing, we offer this service during Holy Week for the remission of our sins. We should prepare for this service in a prayerful way, as we do for Holy Communion.

Great and Holy Thursday: On Holy Thursday we turn to the last events of our Lord and His Passion. Thursday morning begins with a Vespereal Divine Liturgy commemorating the Mystical Supper. As previously mentioned, this is actually Holy Thursday evening's service celebrated in the morning in anticipation. Everyone who is able should make an effort to receive Holy Communion at this service as it was at the Mystical Supper that our Lord instituted the Holy Eucharist. At this Liturgy a second Host is consecrated and kept in the Tabernacle. It is from this Host that Holy Communion is distributed to the shut-ins and the sick throughout the coming year.

Thursday evening actually begins the services of Great and Holy Friday. The service of the Twelve Passion Gospels commemorates the solemn time of our Lord's Crucifixion. After the reading of the fifth Gospel, the holy cross is carried around the church in procession, and Christ's body is nailed to the cross in the center of the church. (Link to the 12-passion Gospels https://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/gospel12_e.htm)

Great and Holy Friday: This is a day of strict fast. As little as possible should be eaten on this day. It is the only day in the entire year that no Divine Liturgy of any kind can be celebrated. In the morning we celebrate the Royal Hours. These solemn hours are observed as we read the various accounts and hymns concerning the crucifixion. In the afternoon we celebrate the Vesper service of the taking down of Christ's body from the cross. During the Gospel reading, our Lord's body is taken off the cross and wrapped in a new, white linen sheet. This act commemorates the removal of Christ's body from the cross by Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38-42). Later in the service, the Epitaphios, or winding-sheet, with Christ's body on it is carried in procession and placed in the recently decorated tomb. In the evening the Lamentations Orthros service is sung. This service begins in a solemn manner, but by the end of the service we are already anticipating the Resurrection of our Lord. Remember again, that the Holy Friday evening Orthros is actually the first service of Holy Saturday, the day in which we commemorate our Lord's body resting in the tomb while His all-pure soul descends into Hades to free the faithful of the Old Covenant.

Great and Holy Saturday: This day is a day of hope and waiting. In the morning we celebrate a Vespereal Divine Liturgy which commemorates Christ's victory over death. Bright vestments are worn as we anticipate Christ's Resurrection. Laurel leaves are strewn throughout the church during the service, because in the ancient world laurel leaves were a sign of victory. As the leaves are strewn, the choir chants "Arise O God and Judge the earth, for to Thee belong all the nations." The Old Testament story of Jonah in the belly of the whale is read at this service because Jonah is seen in the Church as a Type of Christ. As Jonah was three days in the belly of the great fish, and was then safely deposited back onto land, so our Lord was three days in the tomb before His glorious Resurrection. The Vespereal Divine Liturgy of Holy Saturday concludes the services of Holy Week, and brings us to the eve of Great and Holy Pascha.

Source: Serbian Orthodox Church

http://www.spc.rs/eng/holy_week_explanation_2

Saints of the Week

8 / 21 April — The Holy Apostles Herodion, Agabus, Rufus, Asyncritus, Phlegon and Hermas - They were all among the Seventy, and are all mentioned by St Paul in his Epistles. Herodion was a kinsman of Paul's: 'Salute Herodion my kinsman', he writes to the Romans (16:11). Herodion suffered greatly at the hands of the Jews as Bishop of Neoparthia; he was beaten about the head, stoned on the mouth and stabbed in the legs. When they had left him for dead, St Herodion arose and continued to serve the apostles. He helped the Apostle Peter in Rome, and was beheaded along with many other Christians on the same day that Peter was crucified. St Agabus had a spirit of prophecy. Two of his prophecies are recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. First, he prophesied a great famine throughout the world, which came to pass in the time of Claudius Caesar (Acts 11:2~). The second was when he met the Apostle Paul in Caesarea. Paul was on his way to Jerusalem, and Agabus took Paul's girdle and bound himself hand and foot, saying: 'Thus saith the Holy Spirit: so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle' (21:11). St Rufus was Bishop of Thebes in Greece. The Apostle Paul mentions him also: 'Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord' (Rom. 16:13). St Asyncritus (Rom. 16:14) was Bishop of Hyrcania in Asia. St Phlegon, who is mentioned in the same place as St Rufus, was bishop in the Thracian city of Marathon. St Hermas, mentioned with the others, was bishop in Dalmatia. All these, with bee-like industry, spread the Gospel, suffering greatly for the love of Christ. They all went to the eternal Kingdom of their beloved Christ;

St Niphon, Bishop of Novgorod - distinguished by his great enthusiasm in constructing and restoring the churches of God and by showing great courage in opposing the stances of the tyrannical princes. Thirteen days before his death, St. Theodosius appeared to Niphon and announced his imminent passing over to the other world. He died in the year 1156 A.D.; St Celestine, Bishop of Rome.

9 / 22 April — The Holy Martyr Eupychius - He was of gentle birth and was reared in faith and devotion. In the time of the Emperor Julian the Apostate, when St Basil the Great was governing the Church in Caesarea, Eupychius married a girl of good family. But he was not given even one day to live in wedlock, for, on his wedding day itself, there was a pagan festival with sacrifices to the idol of Fortune. Eupychius went out with some others and smashed all the idols in the temple, then pulled

down the temple itself. Julian was furious, and commanded that the culprits be beheaded, that many Christians be taken into the army, that an enormous levy be imposed on Christians, the proceeds of which were to be used to rebuild the Temple of Fortune, and that the town cease to be called Caesarea (as it had been named by Claudius Caesar), and revert to its former name, Maza. Euppsychius was first bound to a tree and cruelly tortured, and then beheaded, in 362. A little after this time, the wicked Emperor Julian visited that town on his way to Persia, against which he was waging war. St Basil went to meet him, bearing three barley loaves as a sign of honour and welcome. The Emperor ordered that, as a return gift, the saint be given a fistful of hay. Basil said to the Emperor: 'You ridicule us now, O King; we bring you bread, by which we are fed, and you give us miserable food which you, with all your power, are not able to turn into nourishment for men!' To this the Emperor replied: 'You can be sure that I will feed you with this hay when I return from Persia ! ' But the wicked apostate did not return alive from Persia, but perished there by a fitting and un-natural death;

Our Holy Father Vadim the Martyr - During the reign of the Persian Emperor Sapor, Vadim, the abbot of a certain monastery and a man famous for his generosity was cast into prison with seven of his disciples. With them in prison was a certain Prince Nirsan who was also a Christian. Everyday they were taken out and beaten. Prince Nirsan became terrified and promised to deny the Faith and worship the sun. This was gratifying to Sapor and he promised to give Nirsan, among other things, the entire estate of Vadim's monastery if he would behead Vadim by his own hand. Nirsan agrees to this. With a quivering hand and frightened by the majestic countenance of St. Vadim, he struck this holy man with the sword many times on the neck until he finally beheaded him. Shortly after that, Nirsan succumbed to despair and stabbed himself with the sword and received at his own hand, the due punishment for the murder of the righteous one. St. Vadim suffered in the year 376 A.D.; St. Woutruide.

10 / 23 April — The Holy Martyrs Terence, Africanus, Maximus; Pompeius and 36 others with them - They suffered for Christ and were crowned with wreaths of glory in the time of the Emperor Decius. By the Emperor's orders, the governor of Africa notified all the people that they must offer sacrifice to idols. In the case of opposition, the governor was to put the stubborn to harsh torture. Hearing this threat, many lapsed from the Faith and worshipped idols. But these forty martyrs remained steadfast, for which they were put to torture. St Terence encouraged his companions with these words: 'Let us, my brethren, keep ourselves from denying Christ our God; that He may not deny us before His heavenly Father and the holy angels.' The governor divided them into two groups; thirty-six of them, after flogging and having salt rubbed in their open wounds, he beheaded. But the first four he cast into prison with heavy chains round their necks and on their hands and feet. An angel of God appeared to them in the prison and touched their chains, which fell from them. Then the angel brought them a table abundantly heaped with food, and fed them. They were again taken out and tortured, and again shut up in the prison. Also, the governor ordered sorcerers to gather as many poisonous reptiles as possible, such as snakes and scorpions, and to shut them up with the martyrs. But the reptiles would not touch the men of God, but huddled together in one corner, where they remained for three days. When the prison was opened on the third day, the reptiles fell on the sorcerers and bit them. At last the governor passed sentence of death on these four martyrs. When they were taken to the scaffold, they joyfully sang psalms and hymns of thanksgiving to God, who had accounted them worthy of a martyr's death. They suffered with honour and attained to the Kingdom in the year 250.;

The Six Thousand Martyrs in Georgia - In the wilderness of David-Garejeli in Georgia, there were twelve monasteries in which many monks practiced and lived the ascetical life for centuries. In 1615 A.D., the great king of Persia, Shah Abbas I, attacked Georgia, devastated it and beheaded many Christians. Once while hunting early in the morning on the Feast of the Resurrection, Shah Abbas noticed many lights in the mountains. They were the monks from the twelve monasteries in procession around the Church of the Resurrection with lighted tapers in hand. When the Shah discovered that they were monks, he asked in amazement: "Has not all of Georgia been given over to the sword?" He then ordered his soldiers to immediately go and behead all the monks. At that moment an angel of God appeared to Abbot Arsenius and informed him of impending death. Arsenius informed his brethren. They all received Communion of the All-Pure Mysteries and prepared themselves for death. Suddenly, the assailants arrived and hacked to pieces, first of all, the abbot, who came before the others and, after that, all the rest. They all suffered honourably and were crowned with incorruptible wreaths in the year 1615 A.D. Thus, ended the history of these famous monasteries which, for more than a thousand years, served as the spiritual hearth of enlightenment for the Georgians. Only two of the monasteries exist today: St. David and St. John the Forerunner. The Georgian Emperor Arcil gathered the relics of the monks and honourably interred them. Even today, these relics emit a sweet-smelling Christ (oil) and heal the sick.

11 / 24 April — The Hieromartyr Antipas, Bishop of Pergamum - He is mentioned in the Book of Revelation as 'Antipas My faithful martyr, who was slain among you where Satan dwelleth'(Rev.2:13)—the city of Pergamum. The inhabitants of this town dwelt in the darkness of idolatry and in the depths of impurity: they were slaves to their passions, slanderers, bullies, incestuous; in brief, slaves of Satan. There among them lived Antipas 'as a light in the midst of darkness, as a rose among thorns, as gold in mud'. He who would seize and kill a Christian was regarded as good and just. The whole of their idolatrous faith consisted in soothsaying, the interpretation of dreams, the service of demons and the extreme excesses of debauchery. In terror of Antipas as of fire, the demons appeared to the pagan priests in their dreams and told them how greatly they were in fear of him, and how this fear was driving them from the city. The priests stirred up the multitude, and they began to torment him and to press him to deny Christ and worship idols. Antipas said to them: 'When your so-called gods and lords of the universe are afraid of me, a mortal man, and have to flee the city, why do you not learn from this that all your faith is in vain?' And the saint spoke further with them of the Christian faith as the only true and saving Faith. But they became incensed like wild beasts and dragged the aged Antipas before the temple of Artemis, where there stood an ox cast in bronze. They heated the ox and threw the servant of God inside. St Antipas, inside the red-hot ox, glorified God with thanksgiving, like Jonah in the whale and the Three Children in the burning fiery furnace. Antipas prayed for his flock and for the whole world until his soul

parted from his exhausted body and went to join the angels in the Kingdom of Christ. He died under torture and was crowned with unfading glory in the year 92: The Holy Martyrs Processus and Martinian.

St. Guthlac, hermit of Crowland (714) - as a young man Guthlac had been a soldier, fighting for Ethelred, the King of Mercia. At the age of twenty-four he renounced both violence and the life of the world and became a monk in an abbey (inhabited by men and women) at Repton and ruled by an abbess named Elfrida. Even in these early years his discipline was of an extraordinary kind. Some of the monks in fact disliked him for refusing any wine or cheering drink. After two years in the monastery it seemed to him far too agreeable a place. He found a wet, remote, unloved spot on a bed of the River Welland in the Fens, and there lived for the rest of his life as a hermit, seeking to imitate the rigours of the old desert saints. His temptations rivalled theirs. Wild men came out of the forest and beat him up. Even the ravens stole his few possessions. But Guthlac said we should be patient, even with wild creatures. Bit by bit the animals and birds came to trust him as their friend. A holy man named Wilfrid once visited Guthlac and was astonished when two swallows landed on his shoulders and then hopped all over him. Guthlac told him, 'Those who choose to live apart from other humans become the friends of wild animals; and the angels visit them too - for those who are often visited by men and women are rarely visited by angels.'

12 / 25 April — GREAT THURSDAY - Our Holy Father Isaac II of Syria - St Gregory the Dialogist writes about this Isaac. He went to Italy in the time of the Goths and went into the church in the town of Spoleto to pray. He asked the verger to leave him locked in the church all night, and thus spent the night in prayer without moving from that place. He spent the next day and night in the same way. The verger called him a hypocrite and struck him a blow—and lost his reason at that same moment. Seeing how the verger was so fiercely tormented, Isaac bent over him and the evil spirit fled from him, leaving him whole. People came to hear of this happening, and the whole town thronged around this wonderful old man. They offered him money and goods, but he refused them all and would accept nothing. Instead, he withdrew to a forest, where he built himself a cell which quickly became transformed into a large monastery. Isaac became famous for his miracles, especially for his discernment. One evening he told the brethren to take all the hoes out to the vineyard and leave them there. The next day, the brethren set out for the vineyard, taking their lunch, as they had no workers. When they got there, they found as many people working as there were hoes to work with. It transpired that these people had come as thieves to steal the hoes, but, by the power of God, they were constrained to work all night. On another occasion, a couple of almost-naked men came seeking clothing from Isaac. He sent a monk to a hollow tree at the end of the road, to bring what he found there. The monk went off, found some clothing and brought it back to the monastery. The abbot took the clothing and gave it to the beggars. They were profoundly ashamed as they recognised their own clothing, which they had concealed in that tree. A man once sent two beehives to the monastery. A monk hid one of them on the way, and brought the other to the abbot. The saint said to him: 'Be careful when you go back to that beehive you hid on the way. It's been taken over by poisonous snakes. Take care they don't bite you!'

St Basil the Confessor; Our Holy Father Acacius; Our Holy Mother Athanasia.

13 / 26 April — GREAT FRIDAY (Stricts Fast) - The Hieromartyr Artemon - He was a priest in Laodicea in the time of the Emperor Diocletian. He spoke thus of himself before the torturers' tribunal: 'I am called Artemon, a servant of Christ my God. Sixteen years I was a reader, and read the services in the Church of my God; twenty-eight years a deacon, and read the Holy Gospel; and have now completed thirty years as a priest, teaching the people and setting them on the way of salvation with the help of Christ.' The judge took him to the temple of Aesculapius, where the priests kept great snakes, regarding them as gods. They meant the snakes to bite Artemon, but he made the sign of the Cross, and by its power riveted the snakes to the ground so that they could not bite him. He then brought them out to the courtyard and breathed on them, and they died instantly. All who saw this were filled with amazement. But the chief of the pagan priests of that temple, Vitalis, seeing this marvel, fell to his knees before Artemon and cried: 'Great is the Christian God!' The martyr baptised him, along with several of his friends. But the evil judge stood firm in his wickedness and tortured the aged Artemon in various ways. He intended at one time to cast him into burning pitch, but fell off his horse into it himself and was burned. Two eagles were seen to descend on him, lift him from his horse and cast him into the pitch. St Artemon remained free for a certain time and went about teaching the people, accompanied always by two tame deer. But he was arrested afresh and beheaded in the year 303. And his soul went to the Kingdom of Christ our God, whom he had served so faithfully; The Holy Martyr Crescens; The Holy Martyr Thomais.

14 / 27 April — GREAT SATURDAY - St Martin the Confessor, Pope of Rome - He became Pope on July 5th, 649, at the time of a furious quarrel between the Orthodox and the Monothelite heretics. Constantine the Second, Heraclius' grandson, was on the throne at the time, and Paul was Patriarch of Constantinople. To restore peace in the Church, the Emperor himself wrote a dogmatic decree, the Typos, which leaned heavily towards heresy. Pope Martin summoned a Council of 105 bishops, at which the Emperor's statement was condemned. At the same time, the Pope wrote a letter to Patriarch Paul, begging him to uphold the purity of the Orthodox faith and to counsel the Emperor to reject the theories of the heretics. This letter infuriated both the Patriarch and the Emperor. The Emperor sent one of his generals, Olympius, to take the Pope to Constantinople in bonds. The general did not dare to bind the Pope with his own hands, but instructed one of his soldiers to kill him with the sword in church. But, when the soldier entered the church with his sword concealed, he was instantly blinded. So, by the providence of God, Martin escaped death. At that time, the Saracens fell upon Sicily, and Olympius went off there, where he died. Then, by the intrigues of the heretic Patriarch Paul, the Emperor sent a second general, Theodore, to bind and take the Pope on the charge that he, the Pope, was in collusion with the Saracens and that he did not reverence the most holy Mother of God. When the general arrived in Rome and read the accusation against the Pope, he replied that it was libel; that he had no contact of any sort with the Saracens, the opponents of Christianity, 'and whoever does not confess the most holy Mother of God and do her reverence, let him be damned in this age and in that which is to come'. But this did not affect the general's decision. The Pope was bound and taken to Constantinople, where he lay long in prison in great sickness, tortured by both anxiety and hunger,

until he was finally sentenced to exile in Cherson, where he lived for two years before his death. He gave his soul into the hands of the Lord, for whom he had suffered so greatly, in 655. The evil Patriarch, Paul, died two years before him and, when the Emperor visited him on his deathbed, he smote his head against the wall, confessing with tears that he had greatly sinned against Pope Martin and asking the Emperor to set Martin free. The Holy Martyrs Antony, John and Eustace; The Holy Martyr Ardalion the Actor; New Martyr Sergius (Trofimov) of Nizhni-Novgorod and one with him. **15 / 28 April —The Holy Apostles Aristarchus, Pudens and Trophimus** - These were all numbered among the Seventy. Aristarchus was Bishop of Apamea in Syria. The Apostle Paul mentions him several times (Acts 19:29; Col. 4:10; Philem. v.24). He was seized in Ephesus, together with Gaius, by a mob that had risen up against Paul. The Apostle wrote to the Colossians: 'Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner saluteth you', and, in the Epistle to Philemon, Paul calls Aristarchus 'my fellow-labourer', together with Mark, Demas and Lucas. Pudens was an eminent Roman citizen. The Apostle Paul mentions him once (II Tim. 4:21). Pudens' house was first the refuge of the chief apostles and was then turned into a church dedicated to the Good Shepherd. Trophimus was an Asian (Acts 20:4), and accompanied St Paul on his journeys. In one place, Paul writes: 'Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick (11 Tim. 4:21). During Nero's persecution, when the Apostle Paul was beheaded, these glorious martyrs were also beheaded. The Holy Martyr Sabbas the Goth; The Holy Martyrs Vasilissa and Anastasia; St. Ruadhan, founder and abbot of Lothra, Ireland (c.584).

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