

Holy Week: Holy Friday & Saturday Evenings

HOLY THURSDAY EVENING

Setting: The Upper Room

I. The Washing of the Disciple's Feet

Gospel Text: John 13:2-17 At Jewish meals it was customary for the youngest to wash the hands of the guest present. Christ takes it a step further- he washes the feet in an expression of extreme humility.

When Christ washed the feet of his disciples, he fulfilled a prophecy.

"He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt 23:11-12).

Teaching on true discipleship: Christ says this in the middle of a series of condemnations of the Jewish Religious Teachers (Scribes & Pharisees).

Liturgical Hymn:

"Humbling Yourself in your compassion, You have washed the feet of your disciples, teaching them to take the path which as God You have followed. And Peter, who at first refused to be washed, yielded then to the divine command, and earnestly asked you that we may be granted Your great mercy."

* Note: In certain Cathedrals and monasteries, there is a special ceremony of feet washing which follows the Liturgy. The bishop or abbot takes the role of Christ and twelve priests represent the apostles.

The Washing on the Feet in relation to the Eucharist:

The connection between the extreme humility in the washing was a teaching in the Cross. Our lives are to be one of sacrifice to God. The sacrifice is accomplished in Christ from the moment of his incarnation. All the acts of his life (his baptism, fasting, washing of the feet, offering the Last Supper and going to the cross all express a given reality: the extreme humility of Christ is his sacrifice and our salvation. The "Teaching" was then followed by the Offering; likewise in our Liturgy the "Proclaiming of the Gospel Lesson" precedes the Offering of the Liturgy.

"The Mystical Supper on Thursday, which is the intentional acceptance of life of sacrifice, is but a preparation for accepting sufferings openly, even unto death" (Matthew the Poor, p.122).

II. The Last Supper and His Passion

Christ radically changes the meaning of the meal - He becomes the lamb:

"The Lord in fact sacrificed his body before the cross. When He offered His body to his disciples at the last supper. The sacrifice and the shedding of his blood had been carried out by his own will and intention, as His fasting bears witness and proves. It was not

easy that the Lord, while sitting among his disciples and eating and drinking with them should say, "this is my body that is offered&ldots;this is my blood shed&ldots;" unless he had actually undergone that sacrifice, even though it were mystically as in fasting" (Matthew the Poor, p. 120).

It was in the context of the Last Supper that Judas had decided to betray the Lord: We must always be watchful!

"At Thy mystical supper, Son of God. Today receive me as a communicant; For I will not give You a kiss as did Judas; But as the thief I confess You; Remember me, Lord, when you come into your kingdom."

*Note: At the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul and at other Patriarchates as Autocephalous Churches, the Holy Chrism is blessed during the Liturgy on this day; but the rite does not take place every year. At this service the "reserve sacrament" is consecrated to be used during the entire year for visitations to hospitals and shut-ins.

Fasting: wine and oil are permitted at the meal of the day.

All four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, agree on the events preceding the crucifixion (The Last Supper, Prayer of Jesus in the garden, his betrayal) and all agree the Last Supper occurred on Thursday evening and he was crucified on Friday.) Matthew, Mark, and Luke say the Last Supper was a Passover meal (Mk. 14:12-16; Lk. 22:15), but John says the Last Supper took place on the 13-14th. Nisan (Jn18:28 19:14) The tendency to support John's reckoning has to do with the belief that Christ was crucified at the same time as the Passover Lambs were being slaughtered.

The Orthodox perspective: The emphasis is on the coming of the Messiah in the person of Christ. Christ fulfills all forms of Jewish Liturgical Life in Himself. The "old" cult had now become "new" in Christ, and the Judeo-Christians were now part of a messianic society that found redemption in the sacrifice of Christ. Christ brings a NEW meaning to the meal and identifies himself as the one offering and being offered for the redemption of sinners.

The connection between the Last Supper and the Crucifixion:

"In the mystery of the Supper, Christ explained that perfect actual sharing in the belief in the crucified Christ as a sacrifice of salvation and remission of sins must be accomplished by actually partaking of the body and the blood in accordance with the mystery perfected in the Thursday Supper&ldots;The Orthodox Church thus believes that the Thursday Supper, Which is the Eucharist, and the Friday crucifixion are one and the same mystery, and also one cannot comprehend the one without the other, nor can the secret of the power of one be attained without the other" (Matthew the Poor, p. 144).

Setting: The Garden and His Passion

III. The Garden of Gethsemane

Why The Garden?

"Was it not in the Garden of Paradise that Adam was stripped naked by sin and went out from the presence of God, so that mankind in Adam entered into a state of separation from God and into death?" (Matthew the Poor).

The Passion of Christ—"taking on our sin"

- 1 *"He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree" (1Pt 2:24)&ldots;So his distress and grief and the sorrow of his Soul are evidence that of his free will he mysteriously accepted what mankind was to lay upon him on the cross" (Matthew the Poor).*
- 2 *"My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Mark 14:34) "The meaning of the phrase in Greek is "sorrow which almost kills" (Bishop Traketellas Authority & Passion, p. 206).*
- 3 *"The Disciples, Peter, James and John: These three were chosen by Jesus to be with him at the miracle of the resurrection of Jairus' daughter (Mk 5:37) and at his transfiguration (Mk 9:2). This suggests that something great is about to happen" (Bishop Traketellas).*
- 4 *"Christ in Gethsemane, amid the unbearable sorrow of his sacrifice, also must taste the indescribable pain caused by his favorite disciples. He is alone, though his chosen ones are near him!" (Bishop Traketellas).*

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Suffering before Gethsemane: "For there is no way to discover any law or principle that governs the distribution of suffering. Why? Because sin ruled over man instead of God, and sin knows no law. The law of sin is injustice; its rule is inequality and its principle is tyranny" (Matthew the Poor).

Suffering After Gethsemane: Christ, by accepting suffering in this way, gave pain itself a greater value&ldots;it became a sacrifice of love and a work of redemption&ldots;suffering is no longer a participation in the sin of Adam, but participation in the love of Christ" (Matthew the Poor).

Our "New" Perspective: "The Christian who truly believes in the cross should not abuse his freedom and shun it, for the Christian who has fathomed the depth of the Cross conceives suffering as a part and parcel of his faith, or even a portion of his own which he cherishes and is happy to fulfill, and a goal for which he strikes out fearlessly" (Matthew The Poor).

IV. The Betrayal of Christ By Judas

Judas was "one of the twelve" and came and kissed him many times. The Scribes and Pharisees are there, this time not asking questions but taking him by force.

V. The Trial

Late Thursday night, early Friday Morning.

Jesus' trial was a double trial; · Religious: The court of the High priest (Sanhedrin) charged Jesus of blasphemy. "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus: "I am" (Mt. 26:63). · Civil/Political: They found no crime in him.

*Note: Pilate is indecisive and Judas is decisive

"There are evil men but the most evil are those who are religious evil men such as Stalin, Ayatolla, Judas, and High priests" (Fr. Florovsky).

VI. The Crucifixion

"Today He who hung the earth upon the waters is hung upon the Cross. He who wraps the heavens in clouds is wrapped in the purple of Mockery. The Bridegroom of the church is transfixed with nails. The Son of the virgin is pierced with a spear. We venerate Your passion, O Christ show us your glorious Resurrection" (Hymn following the Fifth Gospel Reading).

Jesus' saying: Jesus sees his Mother and commands her to John · Absolute love: "Forgive them for they know not what they do." "A new commandment, I give you, that you love one another." Those who were crucified were drugged to ease the pain, but Christ refused the gall. The moan of Christ is from Psalm 21: "My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me."

HOLY FRIDAY EVENING

I. The Structure of Services

- 1 Royal Hours
- 2 Vespers of the Taking Down of the Cross (apokathilosis=un-nailing)
- 3 Lamentations Matins On this day we celebrate the burial of Christ and His descent into Hell
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The **Epitaphion** is a rectangular icon of stiffen cloth on which is embroidered the figure of the dead Christ laid out for burial.

The mood is a happy sadness. This service is Christ's Sabbath day rest in the Tomb (Friday Evening Service is actually pertaining to Saturday Morning). The Sabbath finds its restoration in Christ. He took humanity in his own flesh and visited the dead showing them that indeed a resurrection/restoration of humanity is now made possible.

"Today You do keep the seventh Day. Which you blessed of old by resting from your works. You bring all things into being and you make all things new. Observing the Sabbath rest, my Savior, and restoring your strength."

II. The Lamentations

The lamentations are based upon Psalm 118

Celebration of Christ as the Life of the World!

- *"Thou O Christ the Life, was laid in the tomb, and armies of angels were amazed, and they glorified your great humility."*
- *"O Life, how can you die? How can you dwell in a tomb? You have destroyed the kingdom of death, and have raised up those in Hades."*
- *"Thou O, Christ the Life, was laid in the tomb, and by your death you have destroyed death and shed life upon the world."*
- *"We all the faithful, who were redeemed from death by the tomb, extol with hymns your crucifixion and your Tomb, O Christ."*
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III. Christ The Victor

"When you, the Redeemer of all, were laid for the sake of all in a new tomb hell was brought to scorn and, seeing you, drew back in fear. The bars were broken and the gates were shattered, the tombs were opened and the dead arose. Then Adam in thanksgiving and rejoicing cried to You: "Glory to your self-abasement, O you who love humankind" (Hymn of Holy Friday).

IV. The Reaction of Creation

"And on that Day," says the Lord God, "I will make the sun to go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation" (Amos 8:9).

V. The Funeral Procession

The procession follows around the outside of the Church while everyone sings "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal have mercy on us." This is the traditional funeral hymn sung at the procession into a Church at the beginning of a funeral. God did die on a Cross, yet, death had no power over Him and he descended to preach in Hell the resurrection

VI. Joseph and Nicodemus

"Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews" (John 3:1). Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them said: "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does? (John 7:50). "And when evening had come, since it was the day of preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the Kingdom for God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus and bound it in cloths with spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews (John 19:39-40).

Q: Are we night time disciples?