

HOLY PASCHA WEEK BOOKLET

St. Mary & St. Athanasius Coptic Orthodox Church, 2023



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Palm Sunday

Entry of our Lord into Jerusalem

Happy Feast of Palm Sunday! During the Palm Sunday liturgy, the Church commemorates the entry of our Lord into Jerusalem. We read the Gospel according to St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John. On Palm Sunday, as Jesus was heading to Jerusalem from Bethany, the place where He raised Lazarus from the dead, He asked his disciples to go into a village to get a colt for Him to ride ([Mark 11:2](#)). By riding on a colt, Jesus fulfilled the following prophecy from Zechariah: “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!” ([John 12:15](#), [Zechariah 9:9](#)) As He was entering Jerusalem, the people laid clothes and palms on the road ([Matthew 21:8](#)) and were chanting “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” ([Matthew 21:9](#))

From this passage, there are many takeaways and lessons we can learn. In one of St. John Chrysostom’s Homilies, he says “But these things He did, not as displaying any pomp, but at once, as I have said, both fulfilling a prophecy, and teaching self-denial, and at the same time also comforting His disciples, who were grieving for His death, and showing them that He suffers all these things willingly” ([Homily 66 on St. Matthew](#)).

Firstly, there is the humility of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was considered a King. In fact, the people in Jerusalem were calling Him the King of Israel ([John 12:13](#)). Normally, kings are riding on chariots or in some great way to signify their status and royalty. But Jesus Christ instead rode on a mere colt into Jerusalem. Hence, He humbled himself--very similar to how he humbled himself by being crucified on the Cross. He did not choose the praise of Man, which can be a form of self-denial. He shows us an example of humility to apply in our daily lives.

Additionally, St. John Chrysostom addresses how Jesus rode on a colt into Jerusalem to show the disciples how the suffering He will endure is willingly and not by force. Before entering into Jerusalem, Jesus says to his disciples “Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here” ([Luke 19:30](#)). Jesus asked the disciples to get a colt, showing how He chose to ride on a colt. He was not forced into riding the colt. Even if it is riding a colt, this scene demonstrates how what Jesus went through during Holy Week was willingly.

During the duration of the Holy Week, let us remember the humility and self-denial our Lord went through and apply that in our own lives.

Holy Monday

Prophecies:

❖ First Hour

- [Genesis 1-2](#): Creation of the universe and man.
- [Isaiah 5:1-9](#): Vineyard as a symbol of Israel.
- [Sirach 1:1-19](#): The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom.

❖ Third Hour

- [Isaiah 5:20-30](#): Anger of the Lord against those who call right as wrong, and wrong as right.
- [Jeremiah 9:12-19](#): Forsaking the Law of the Lord to pursue evil lusts.

❖ Sixth Hour

- [Exodus 32:7-15](#): Israelites worshipping the golden calf.
- [Wisdom of Solomon 1:1-9](#): Perverse thoughts separate people from God.

❖ Ninth Hour

- [Genesis 2:15 - 3:24](#): The Fall of Man.
- [Isaiah 40:1-5](#): The Glory of God shall appear.
- [Proverbs 1:1-9](#): The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom.

❖ Eleventh Hour

- [Isaiah 50:1-3](#): The power of God to save.
- [Sirach 1:20-30](#): The Fear of the Lord is the root of Wisdom.

Gospels:

- ❖ First Hour ([Mark 11:12-24](#)) | The unfruitful fig tree and the cleansing of the temple.
- ❖ Third Hour ([Mark 11:11-19](#)) | Cleansing of the Temple.
- ❖ Sixth Hour ([John 2:13-17](#)) | Cleansing of the Temple.
- ❖ Ninth Hour ([Matthew 21:23-27](#)) | Jews Question the Authority of Christ.
- ❖ Eleventh Hour ([John 8:51-59](#)) | Conversation with the Jews
“Before Abraham was I AM.”

Major Themes:

The Beginning

At the beginning of the week of Pascha, it is fitting to begin the journey with the question “What happened?” It is, for this reason, the Church arranges the reading of the first three chapters of the Book of Genesis, to explain the beginning of all things. These chapters answer the question “What was the original intention of God in creating man?”

The creation of man was solely out of love. Love is outward, love is an action, and love begets something. The love of God caused the creation of man. God loved man and gave him dominion over all things. In conjunction with the reading from Isaiah Chapter 5, we see the vineyard as a symbol of humanity. God planted the vineyard, hedged it, and gave it water. God has not left humanity in need of anything. As St. Gregory states in his liturgy “You have not left me in need of any of the works of your honor.”

The original intention of God for man was to be in a harmonious and loving relationship with his Creator.

The Fall

As a result of the deception of the devil, humanity was tempted, and it fell. Continuing in the symbol of the vineyard, the Lord God states, “When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes [thorns]?” ([Isaiah 5:2](#)). God is clearly saying that humanity performed that which was the opposite of its purpose. A vine brings forth grapes, not thorns. Humanity was supposed to enjoy perfect communion with God, but it did not.

The Consequence of the Fall

The consequence of the fall of man is a tarnished, damaged, and diseased nature. This corrupt nature allows man to:

1. Call evil good, and good evil (Third Hour).
2. Worship a golden calf (Sixth Hour).
3. Forsake the law of the Lord and pursue lusts (Ninth Hour).

These actions are all deviations from the purpose of man. From the perspective of God as a loving Father, His children are sick. Sick with the disease of sin. Not only this but the children prefer sickness over health. The house of Israel is comfortable being separated from God. What is the Father to do for His children?

Solution

The solution, the antidote, is that salvation is found in the incarnation of the Son of God in order to save man. The Lord says in the prophecy of Isaiah in the 11th hour, “Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem?” ([Isaiah 50:2](#)).

The Lord is not comfortable with humanity being comfortable in sin. In the prophecy of Isaiah in the 9th hour, it is written “Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain” ([Isaiah 40:4](#)). The Lord came to the earth to return man to his original purpose. Why? How? He continues “And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together...” ([Isaiah](#)

[40:5](#)). This signals the coming of the Lord, and it is visible in the Gospel of St. John, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” ([John 1:14](#)). Salvation was seen by mankind, it was the glory of God in the Son Jesus Christ.

The Gospels in the Ninth and Eleventh hours show the inability of the Pharisees to understand that the person they are speaking with is the Son of God. They question the authority of Christ (Ninth hour), and in the Eleventh hour is the monumental revelation of Christ. The Pharisees accuse the Lord of being a Samaritan and demon-possessed. They ask Him “Who do you make yourself out to be?” ([John 8:53](#)). The Lord responds “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” ([John 8:58](#)). This emphatic answer by the Lord makes the Pharisees extremely unsettled, disturbed, and angry. They even take up stones to stone the Lord, but He passes through the midst of them.

“I AM” is the name of God, and it is an unutterable name. From the Pharisees' perspective, Christ is blaspheming, and making Himself equal with God. They are blinded by the pride of their hearts. The solution to the problem of the human race is in the Lord, fully God, fully man, who is able to save mankind. The rejection of Christ by the Pharisees sets up and puts in motion most of the events going forward through the week, until the crucifixion.

Outward vs. Inward

With the imagery of the tree and fruit throughout the readings, it was highly fitting for the Church to arrange the Gospel reading of the unfruitful fig tree. Oftentimes people question the action of Christ in cursing the unfruitful tree, as the Gospel states “for it was not the season for figs” ([Mark 11:13](#)). However, the Lord Christ, in His excellent wisdom, teaches us that the issue was not in the season, but in that the tree had leaves. The big green leaves gave the impression that there was fruit. The Lord expected fruit, but He did not find it. Similar to what God says in Isaiah, “When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes [thorns]?” ([Isaiah 5:2](#)).

Similarly is the house of Israel, as is seen in the cleansing of the temple. The Jews had the facade of religion and worship, which can be called the leaves. But when the Lord went into the temple to find fruit, He did not find any. He rather found buying, selling, and complete disregard for the purpose of the temple. That is why Christ echoes the voice of the Old Testament and says “‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers” ([Matthew 21:13](#)). The purpose of the temple was prayer and communication with God. There was a deviation from this purpose and a corruption of the gifts of God. Similarly, through sin, there was a deviation from man’s purpose and a perversion or corruption of human nature.

The two major problems:

1. The Jews strayed from their purpose as the nation of God (reminder that the purpose of man was to be in communion with God, not separated)
2. The Jews attempted to show forth leaves and hide their lack of fruit (reminder of the fig tree with leaves and no fruit, and the leaves Adam and Eve covered themselves with)

This theme echoes throughout the entire Bible. God hates lying and deception. God wants us to be hot or cold, not lukewarm. We must not attempt to hide between a cover. God is not to be fooled. Solomon says in his wisdom in the sixth hour “God is witness of their innermost feelings, and a true observer of their hearts” ([Wisdom of Solomon 1:6](#)).

As with sickness, there must be honesty. One cannot ignore that he/she is sick; that is extremely unwise. If one is sick with the disease of sin, there must be a “reality check” and admit that there is a problem that needs a solution. For this reason, St. Shenouda the Archimandrite commands us in the homily of the first hour to have an honest self-examination each night.

The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom

This statement is repeated three times during the prophecies. What is the fear of the Lord?

The fear of the Lord is the knowledge that there is a God and that each and every one of us is in a relationship with Him. There is a purpose to humanity, which is to know and love God. If this is understood, then there is wisdom and discernment.

The first step in analyzing a problem is to understand its cause or root. This is what the Church accomplishes on Monday morning of Pascha. We are reminded of the intention of God, our original purpose. It is imperative that there is a return to this original purpose, which is salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. As the church chants in the Feast of the Cross “It is through His Cross, and His Holy Resurrection, He **restored** man once again to the paradise.”

Holy Tuesday

The Parable Tuesday

The Tuesday of Holy Week is commonly called Parable Tuesday. Some parables that are read during the services include the Parable of Talents (11th Hour of Tuesday), the Parable of the Wedding (1st Hour of Wednesday Eve), and the Parable of the 10 Virgins (6th Hour of Wednesday Eve). Other teachings that are read during Holy Tuesday or Wednesday Eve include what it will be like at the end time (9th Hour of Tuesday), how we should be a watchful servant (3rd Hour of Wednesday Eve), and how Jesus is the Light of the World (6th Hour of Tuesday). Many of these parables are used as analogies for us to get a glimpse of what Heaven is like. For example, the Parable of Talents, of the Wedding, and 10 Virgins all start with some sort of variation of “the kingdom of heaven is like” ([Matthew 25:14](#), [Matthew 22:2](#), and [Matthew 25:1](#), respectively). By using parables, the Lord illustrates what Heaven is like, and we can understand our duties as Christians.

The 11th Hour of Tuesday itself is one of the more significant hours of Holy Tuesday for two reasons. Firstly, it is the first time that Christ has specified when He will be crucified. In the Gospel, we read “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified” ([Matthew 26:2](#)). As His time of crucifixion has for the first time been established, we add “my Good Savior” to the end of the second verse of *Thok Te Ti Gom*. Additionally, we sing *Pekethronos*

during this hour, a hymn remembering how the throne of God is everlasting and how God is Just. Singing this hymn prepares us for this hour's Gospel reading about rewarding everyone for their works. In the Parable of the Talents, the servant master was proud of the man with 5 talents and the man with 2 talents for using their talents to gain more talents. The servant's master was upset with the servant who did not use his talent and was punished. Likewise, God will reward us for what we do here on Earth.

Holy Tuesday's significance is due to the reminder throughout the day of many of Christ's teachings while also remembering how He will reward us for our works. Finally, Tuesday is the first time He gives clarity to His disciples that He will be crucified on Passover.

Holy Wednesday

Prophecies:

❖ First Hour

- [Exodus 17:1-7](#): Water Flowing Out of the Rock.
- [Proverbs 3:5-14](#): Trusting in the Lord with all Your Heart.
- [Hosea 5:13-6:3](#): Returning to God to Heal our Sicknesses.

❖ Third Hour

- [Exodus 13:17-22](#): The Lord as the Fountain of Life.
- [Sirach 22:7-18](#): The Foolishness of Sinners,

❖ Sixth Hour

- [Exodus 14:13-15:1](#): The Splitting of the Red Sea.
- [Sirach 23:7-14](#): The Dangers of Not Repenting,

❖ Ninth Hour

- [Genesis 24:1-9](#): Betrothment of Isaac and Rebecca.
- [Numbers 20:1-13](#): Moses Banished from the Promised Land.
- [Proverbs 1:11-35](#): The Importance of Wisdom and the Fear of the Lord.

❖ Eleventh Hour

➤ [Isaiah 28:16-29](#): The Lord as Our Redeemer.

Gospels:

- ❖ First Hour ([John 11:46-57](#)) | High Priest and Pharisees Plan to Arrest Christ.
- ❖ Third Hour ([Luke 22:1-6](#)) | Judas Agrees to Betray Christ.
- ❖ Sixth Hour ([John 12:1-8](#)) | Mary of Bethany Anointing Christ's Feet.
- ❖ Ninth Hour ([Matthew 26:3-16](#)) | Mary Anointing Christ's Feet and Judas's Betrayal.
- ❖ Eleventh Hour ([John 12:27-36](#)) | Christ as the Light of the World.

Overview:

In general, Holy Wednesday focuses on two extreme opposites—**selfless love** and **prideful betrayal**. We see the contrast between these two through the stories of Mary of Bethany anointing the feet of Christ and Judas betraying Christ for a mere thirty pieces of silver. Mary, out of her extreme love for Christ and humility, did not mind using the expensive oil to anoint Christ while Judas, because of his pride, betrayed Christ for only thirty pieces of silver—a relatively small amount. In regards to Mary of Bethany, St. Cyril of Jerusalem describes her actions saying:

“While Martha was serving, Mary anointed the Lord with ointment, thus accomplishing her *love* towards Him; and by the actions of both, the *measure of love was filled up and made perfect.*”

Meanwhile, St. John Chrysostom explains the contrast to Judas’s betrayal saying:

“By covetousness then Judas became what he was, for it follows, And they covenanted to give him money. Such are the evil passions which covetousness engenders, it makes men irreligious, and compels them to lose all knowledge of God, though they have received a thousand benefits from Him, nay, even to injure Him...”

As we contemplate the prophecies and Gospels of Holy Wednesday, let us strive to be like Mary of Bethany who served out of her overflowing of selfless love, and not like Judas—who led himself to the path of damnation through his pride, greed, and selfishness.

First Hour:

In the first prophecy of the first hour, we read from the book of Exodus ([Exodus 17:1-7](#)). In this reading, we see the people doubt Moses and the Lord saying, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” ([Exodus](#)

[17:3](#)). However, despite this doubt, the Lord still provides the people with water by instructing Moses to strike a rock. Thus, we see the Lord as a loving Father and as the overflowing Fountain of Life. Our Lord does not abandon us, even when we complain against Him.

In the second prophecy of the first hour, we read from the book of Proverbs ([Proverbs 3:5-14](#)) about the importance of trusting in the Lord. We are instructed not only to “trust in the Lord with all your heart” ([v. 5](#)) but to also “be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil” ([v. 7](#)). Trusting in the Lord means to put away our own pride, our own desires. At all times, we must try to align ourselves with the will of God, and when we do, our paths will be made straight.

The final prophecy of the first hour, from Hosea ([Hosea 5:13-6:3](#)), describes the importance of repentance and returning to the Lord. Ephraim realizes his sickness and returns to the Lord to be healed. It is written, “Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up” ([Hosea 6:1](#)). In the same way, we must be aware of our many sins and make a concerted effort to gain healing through repentance and confession. As St. John Chrysostom explains:

“For Christ has brought the healing. He invited [us] to know the true divine revelation; he confirmed [us] through the

Spirit to observe the commandments. He showed us again to be zealous followers by placing us beyond corruption and freeing us from the previous infirmities, namely, sin and passions.”

For the Gospel of the first hour, the Church reads [John 11:46-57](#). In this reading, we read the prophecy of Caiaphas, which is the conspiracy against Christ. In this reading, many of the Jews which saw the things our Lord did and believed in Him. However, some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. “So, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” ([John 11:46-48](#)). Then Caiaphas the high priest told them that it is better for one man to die for the people and not a nation. From this day the Jews planned to kill Jesus. After this Jesus did not walk openly with the Jews.

There are two types of Jews in this reading, those who believed and those who were irritated and hardened in their unbelief. Some of the Jews who were irritated by seeing the miracles decided to go tell the Pharisees of what they did. Caiaphas “being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.” ([John 11:51-52](#)). The gathering of the children of God who are scattered abroad does not only refer to

unity in a physical sense but in a spiritual sense. The unity that Christ asks for us is not at all based upon the essence of our beings or what is ours, but based on being made one with Him in Christ and the Father.

Third Hour

In the first prophecy of the third hour, we read from the book of Exodus ([Exodus 13:17-22](#)). In this passage, we see God providing the Israelites with directions in the wilderness through “the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people” ([Exodus 13:22](#)). As seen by this, there is a stark contrast between the character of God and the character of Judas. Father Bishoy Kamel explains this saying:

“God cares for His people so much that He walks before them and looks after them. When the enemy draws near, He comes in between them and shields His people from their enemies. But you Judas, intervened between the Lord and the Jews, not for peace, but for betrayal. Thus when we likewise commit sin or betray God, we are in complete opposition to God’s nature and character.”

The second prophecy from Sirach ([Sirach 22:7-18](#)) explains how sinners are akin to fools. It is written, “Seven days do men mourn for him that is dead; but for a fool and an ungodly man all the days

of his life” ([Sirach 22:12](#)). Sin leads to eternal death; thus, we must repent and confess to avoid being seen as a fool in God’s eyes.

For the Gospel of the Third Hour, the Church reads [Luke 22:1-6](#). In this reading, Passover drew near, and the chief priests were seeking to put our Lord to death. “Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them. And they were glad and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of a crowd.”([John 22:3-6](#)). St. Cyril of Alexandria says, “Judas lost heaven for a little silver. He missed the crown of immortality and the desirable honor of the apostleship.”

If we seek the earthly desires over the heavenly desires, we will fall into many sins, which will lead us to our destruction.

Sixth Hour

In the first prophecy of the sixth hour, we read from the book of Exodus ([Exodus 14:13-15:1](#)). In this reading, we listen to how Moses split the Red Sea (through God’s grace)—freeing the Israelites from Egypt. The Pharaoh’s heart was hardened and it led to his death along with the death of all his soldiers. On the other hand, Moses’s heart was aligned with God’s will, which led to his salvation and the salvation of all the Israelites. Meanwhile, the crossing of the Red Sea can be viewed as a sort of Baptism for the Israelites that was

consecrated by the blood of the Egyptians. St. Augustine of Hippo contemplates further on this reading saying:

“This people of God, freed from a great and broad Egypt, is led, as through the Red Sea, that in baptism it may make an end of its enemies. For by the sacrament as it were of the Red Sea, that is by baptism consecrated with the blood of Christ, the pursuing Egyptians, the sins, are washed away.”

The next prophecy, from the book of Sirach ([Sirach 23:7-14](#)), warns of the dangers of not only sinning but of not repenting when we do sin. Sinning is inevitable, but every time we sin we must return to the Lord through repentance and confession. It is written, “If he shall offend, his sin shall be upon him: and if he acknowledge not his sin, he makes a double offense” ([Sirach 23:11](#)). This reading emphasizes the importance of repentance. Although Christ died on the cross to save us from our sins, we must still repent and confess to gain the gift of eternal salvation with our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel reading ([John 12:1-8](#)) illustrates the story of Mary of Bethany anointing the feet of Jesus with expensive ointment. Rather than viewing this moment as a beautiful act of love, Judas questions it saying, “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” ([John 12:5](#)). Jesus answers him by saying, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.

For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me” ([John 12:7-8](#)). St. John Chrysostom explains the hardness of Judas’s heart due to the love of money, saying:

“For a dreadful, a dreadful thing is the love of money, it disables both eyes and ears, and makes men worse to deal with than a wild beast, allowing a man to consider neither conscience, nor friendship, nor fellowship, nor the salvation of his own soul, but having withdrawn them at once from all these things, like some harsh mistress, it makes those captured by it its slaves.”

Mary was not a queen or rich woman, but a poor woman. Judas mocked her illustration of love and said it was a waste, but Christ greatly praised her. Allow us to have the same love for the Father that Mary had for Him.

Ninth Hour

In the first prophecy of the ninth hour, we read from the book of Genesis ([Genesis 24:1-9](#)). This passage describes Abraham’s blessing of the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca. Although this passage may seem rather out of place, the Church wisely uses it as a reminder that the relationship between our soul and God is that of a bride and groom. Jesus is often referred to as the bridegroom while the Church

is referred to as the Bride. In marriage, the bride and groom are made into one through the Holy Spirit. In a similar manner, through the Eucharist, we are united with Jesus Christ.

The second prophecy, from Numbers ([Numbers 20:1-13](#)), explains why God did not allow Moses to enter the promised land. God instructed Moses to hit his rod against the rock once to make water flow from it; however, Moses did not trust God and hit the rock twice. Because of this, God tells Moses, “Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them” ([Numbers 20:12](#)). In a similar way, every sin we commit is an act of disobedience towards God. This is a reminder to us that we must repent and confess to ensure that we are not forbidden from entering the promised land—an eternity in paradise with Christ.

The final prophecy of the ninth hour is from Proverbs ([Proverbs 1:11-35](#)). This reading describes the importance of Wisdom and the Fear of the Lord. As described earlier, the fear of the Lord is the knowledge that there is a God and that each and every one of us is in a relationship with Him. It is written, “Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear

of the Lord” ([Proverbs 1:28-29](#)). St. Augustine of Hippo explains this saying:

“What is it then which Scripture says in many places: ‘They shall call, and I will not hear them’? Yet surely you are merciful to all who call upon you.... Some call, yet call not upon him of whom it is said, ‘They have not called upon God.’ They call, but not on God. You call upon whatever you love: you call upon whatever you draw to yourself, whatever you wish to come to you. Therefore if you call upon God for this reason, in order that money may come to you, that an inheritance may come to you, that worldly rank may come to you, then you are calling upon those things that you desire may come to you; but you are making God the helper of your desires, not the listener to your needs.”

When we call upon the Lord, let us do so out of a desire to have a true, intimate relationship with Him.

For the Gospel of the Ninth Hour, the Church reads [Matthew 26:3-16](#). In this reading, The Chief Priest, and elders Plot to kill Jesus. “Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.”([Matthew 26:14-16](#)). Judas sold our Lord and his salvation for

30 pieces of silver. What are we selling our Lord for? What is stopping us or what are we giving into, or what sin are we committing that is hindering our relationship with our God just as Judas sold our Lord?

Eleventh Hour

The one and only prophecy of the eleventh hour comes from the book of Isaiah ([Isaiah 28:16-29](#)). This prophecy ends the daytime Pascha on a more positive note, where the Lord promises that he will help us overcome any of our tribulations. The Lord says, “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: Whoever believes will not be in haste” ([Isaiah 28:16](#)). This foundation that the Lord established for us is our faith. As long as we remain steadfast in this foundation of faith, we will be able to pass through any tribulations. St. Ambrose of Milan explains this saying:

“The foundation of justice therefore is faith, for the hearts of the just dwell on faith. And the just man that accuses himself builds justice on faith, for his justice becomes plain when he confesses the truth. So the Lord says through Isaiah: “Behold, I lay a stone for a foundation in Zion.” This means Christ as the foundation of the church. For Christ is the

object of faith to all; but the church is as it were the outward form of justice; it is the common right of all...”

For the Gospel of the Eleventh Hour, the Church reads [John 12:27-36](#). In this reading Jesus talks to His Father in front of people and they begin to question Him. “So, the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” So, Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”([John 12:34-36](#)). St. Cyril of Alexandria explains this saying:

“He proved therefore that the faith which is in Him, through Whom a man comes to the knowledge also of the Father, is the way of salvation. And He names them sons of Light whether of Himself or of the Father, for He speaks of the Father as Light after having spoken of Himself as Light--- in order to show that the Nature of Himself and of His Father is One: and we become sons of the Father, when, through the faith which is in Christ, we accept the Father Who is Light; for then shall we also be entitled children of God.”

We need to understand that without Christ, the Light of the World, we will not be able to walk in the right path. Let us pray to God to always reveal His path to us that we may abide with Him.

Covenant Thursday

Prophecies and Matins:

The first hour of Covenant Thursday is different from the rites of all the other hours of Holy Week. First, we read the prophecy and sing *Thok Te Ti Gom*. However, matins is prayed right after as there will be liturgy later. During matins, we sing the Hymn of the Cross, mourn what Judas is about to do, and sing the psalm in its shammy tune (the tune that *Pekethronos* is sung in).

The first hour of Covenant Thursday has a variety of themes. One theme is the power of the cross. In the prophecy of the first hour, we read from [Exodus 17:8-16](#). This prophecy is about when Israel triumphed over Amalek. In this prophecy, we read, “Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed.” ([Exodus 17:11](#)) The lifting of Moses’s hands symbolizes when Christ was crucified on the cross. Hence, the church is reminding us of the power of the cross. When the cross was present, the Israelites, God’s chosen people, prevailed. Otherwise, when Moses’s hands were not lifted, Amalek was winning. Likewise, the cross is a sign of victory over death. St. Paul affirms its power by saying “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” ([1 Corinthians 1:18](#)). The cross is a significant symbol in the faith, and the church through the hymns sung is

reminding us of that. This theme is celebrated singing the Hymn of the Cross *Fai Etaf Enf*.

During matins we are reminded of the future betrayal of Judas and his fate by reading the Praxis from [Acts 1:15-20](#). Additionally, the deacons walk around the church clockwise as a reminder that Judas was of this world while they are repeatedly singing, “Judas who has broken the law”, followed by the Psalm of the 1 Hour, “His words were softened above oil. And they were arrows.” ([Psalm 54:21](#)*) referring to Judas’s words.

**: This is using the Orthodox numbering. In the Protestant numbering, this is Psalm 55:21.*

The Last Supper:

The Gospel of the 1st, 3rd, 6th, and 9th hours of Covenant Thursday are all about the preparation of the Passover meal. In the 1st. hour we read from Gospel according to St. Luke, then St. Matthew in the 3rd. hour, then St. Mark in the 6th. hour, and finally in the 9th. hour the same verses from St. Matthew that were read in the 3rd. hour are repeated. In this Gospel, Jesus asks Peter and John to find a man carrying a pitcher (St. Mark) and ask him where there is room for Jesus to eat the Passover Meal with His disciples.

Then, the Church starts to recall what happens during the evening of the Last Supper. Firstly, through the Liturgy of the Waters (the Laqaan), the Church remembers the time when Christ washed the disciples' feet. During this Gospel, Jesus says, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me," ([John 13:8](#)). This washing of the feet can be symbolic of repentance and confession. As St. John Chrysostom says in *On Repentance and Almsgiving*, "When God, however, wipes out the sins, He leaves no mark. He does not permit even a trace to remain" And God wipes out sins in confession. Just like how after being cleansed, the dirt washes away, after one confesses, the confessed sins are washed away.

Following the Laqaan the Divine Liturgy is celebrated to commemorate when Christ instituted Communion when HE said "Take, eat; this is my body" ([Matthew 26:26](#)) and "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" ([Matthew 26:28](#)).

Finally, during both Divine Liturgy and the eleventh hour, we read about Christ foretelling the betrayal of Judas. During this passage, Jesus tells the disciples that one will betray Him. Jesus reveals that Judas is the one that will betray Him by taking a piece of bread, dipping it into wine, and giving it to Him. After this Judas left.

Eve of Good Friday

On this evening of Thursday, and after the last supper was finished, Christ gives His last sermon to His people (John 14-17). During the 1st. Hour of the evening the church reads from John 13:33- 17:26. This is the only time in the entire year that four gospel readings are read consecutively from the same evangelist! This sermon is a very special one, for it is only spoken to the disciples, unlike the sermon on the mountain where it was addressed to the multitudes, and it is only mentioned in the Gospel of John. In plain language, He speaks to them and announces His departure, recalls His ministry full of deeds, words, and miracles. He also urges them to keep the commandments and to preserve unity among themselves, and at last, He prays for them.

After the Last Supper was finished, the Lord went to the Mount of Olives. He then warned His disciples and said, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.”([Matthew 26:31-32](#)). After hearing this, St. Peter the apostle assumed he can stand next to the Lord through all of this, and never to doubt Him. But what St. Peter did not know about himself, the Lord knew and said, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times. Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same.”([Matthew 26: 34-35](#)).

After this the Lord came to Gethsemane and told His disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” And taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” ([Matthew 26:36-38](#)). The Lord asks the disciples to sit with Him and stay awake. He urges them three times to stay awake and pray, for His betrayers are at hand. Through such persistence, the Lord teaches us the importance of vigil in times of trouble.

Then Jesus went a little further and fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” ([Matthew 26:39](#)). St. Augustine says, “the will of the Father and the Son are one and the same, for they have one Spirit. Then why did Jesus say this? This is so because Jesus has come and took our place, we are being the ones that have rejected God’s will, and therefore Jesus gladly yielded to the cross, in obedience to the Father, and at the same time He wanted this as well. This exactly what the Lord declared “For God so loved the world, that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”. ([John 3:16](#))

While Jesus was talking “Judas came and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; seize Him.” ([Matthew 26:47-48](#)). Then Judas went up to Jesus kissed Him. With a kiss, Judas gave up his

Master. St. Ambrose of Milan says, “You are offering a kiss. What is wanted is not the kiss of lips but rather the kiss of the heart and the soul. And the zeal of St. Peter the apostle did not fail, “And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. ([Matthew 26: 51](#)). But the Lord commanded him to put his sword in its place, and He healed the servant’s ear.

After it had been decided that Jesus shall die, St. Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard when a servant girl asked him, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you mean.”([Matthew 26:69-70](#)). After this, He denied Christ two more times. Peter then remembered Jesus saying, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.” ([Matthew 26:70](#)). St. Cyril the great speaks about St. Peter’s weakness saying that Peter wept in regret, in bitter tears, because of his very serious sin, likewise did his tears fall due to it. He not only wept, but he wept in sincere bitterness. St. Peter is as a man who has fallen, and in courage he got up a second time.

Good Friday: 1st and 3rd

Introduction:

The entire Holy Pascha Week builds up to this moment—the day we recognize Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. To do so, the Church ensures that we trace the footsteps of Christ on the day of His crucifixion, contemplating the Holy Cross. It is an emotional journey, supported by the readings of the Old Testament and the Gospels along with many hymns/prayers. In the first hour, Christ is falsely accused in front of Pontius Pilate. In the third hour, He is beaten, whipped, and bruised for our sakes. In the sixth hour, He is crucified on the cross. In the ninth hour, He delivers his soul up to the Father. In the eleventh hour, He is taken down from the cross. Then, in the twelfth and final hour, He is buried in the tomb.

Christ was the perfect sacrifice because he was both fully human and fully divine. In the Liturgy of St. Gregory, the priest prays, “I believe that Your divinity did not part from Your humanity for a single moment nor a twinkling of an eye. Given for us for salvation, remission of sins and eternal life to those who will partake of It.” Throughout the readings of Great Friday (and Holy Week in general), we can see both the human and divine aspects of our Lord. As St. Ephrem the Syrian explains:

“If He was not flesh, whom did the Jews arrest? And if He was not God, who gave an order to the earth and threw them onto their faces.

If He was not flesh, who was struck with a blow? And if He was not God, who cured the ear that had been cut off by Peter and restored it to its place?

If He was not flesh, who received spitting on his face? And if He was not God, who breathed the Holy Spirit into the faces of His Apostles?

If He was not flesh, who stood before Pilate at the judgement seat? And if He was not God, who made Pilate’s wife afraid by a dream?

If He was not flesh, whose garments did the soldiers strip off and divide? And if He was not God, how was the sun darkened at the cross?

If He was not flesh, who was hung on the cross? And if He was not God, who shook the earth from its foundations?

If He was not flesh, whose hands and feet were transfixed by nails? And if He was not God, how was the veil of the temple rent, the rocks broken and the graves opened?

If He was not flesh, who cried out, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned Me”? And if He was not God, who said “Father, forgive them”?

If He was not flesh, who was hung on a cross with the thieves? And if He was not God, how did he say to the thief, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise”?

If He was not flesh, to whom did they offer vinegar and gall? And if He was not God, on hearing whose voice did Hades tremble?

If He was not flesh, whose side did the lance pierce, and blood and water came out? And if He was not God, who smashed the gates of Hades and tear apart its bonds? And at whose command did the imprisoned dead come out?

If He was not flesh, whom did the Apostles see in the upper room? And if He was not God, how did He enter when the doors were shut?

If He was not flesh, the marks of the nails and the lance in whose hands and side did Thomas handle? And if He was not God, to whom did He cry out, “My Lord and my God”? (Sermon on the Transfiguration, St. Ephrem the Syrian).

However, as we contemplate Christ’s sacrifice, we should remember that Christ died for each one of us on a **personal** level. As St. Augustine explains:

“We see His blood as He dies. We see the price offered by the redeemer, touch the scars of His resurrection. He bows His head, as if to kiss you. His heart is made bare open, as it were, in love to you. His arms are extended that He may embrace you. His whole body is displayed for your redemption. Ponder how great these things are. Let all this be rightly weighed in your mind: as He was once fixed to the cross in every part of His body for you, so He may now be fixed in every part of your soul” (GMI 248, St. Augustine of Hippo).

Through the Cross, Christ granted **you** eternal life; opened a path for **your** salvation; provided **you** with a weapon against any pain or struggle; redeemed **your** corrupt nature; allowed **you** to be with Him in His heavenly kingdom. As we contemplate further on each hour, remind yourself of the enormity and beauty of Christ’s love for you. As St. Cyril of Jerusalem explains:

“The Cross is the crown of victory. It has brought light to those blinded by ignorance. It has released those enslaved by sin. Indeed, it has redeemed the whole of mankind. Do not, then, be ashamed of the Cross of Christ; rather, glory in it. Although it is a stumbling-block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles, the message of the Cross is our salvation. Of course, it is folly to those who are perishing, but to us

who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it was not a mere man who died for us, but the Son of God, God made man” (Treasures of the Fathers of the Church Series, Volume IIIId).

First Hour:

Prophecies

As described earlier, the first hour of Great Friday focuses on the trial of Christ in front of Pontius Pilate. In terms of the readings from the Old Testament, they focus on the struggles between God and man and how salvation can only come from God.

In the first prophecy ([Deuteronomy 8:19-9:24](#)), Moses tells the Israelites how he begged God to not destroy them even though they sinned. The Lord tells Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stubborn people. Let me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven” ([Deut. 9:13-14](#)). However, because of his mercy and the prayers of Moses, the Lord does not destroy them.

The next two prophecies from Isaiah ([Isaiah 1:2-9](#) and [Isaiah 2:10-21](#)) describe God’s grief in seeing His people forsake him and foreshadow Christ’s resurrection. The Lord tells Isaiah, “Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel

does not know, my people do not understand.” The Lord is a loving Father, yet the people of Israel did not care to love Him back. Even simple animals know their caretakers, yet the people of Israel did not know their Father. Despite this, in the next Chapter, the Lord foreshadows His resurrection and the promise of salvation saying, “In that day mankind will cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold which they made for themselves to worship...to enter the caverns of the rocks...from before the terror of the Lord, and from the splendor of his majesty, when He rises to terrify the earth” ([Isaiah 2:20-21](#)). Through the Cross and the Resurrection, we will be reunited with the Father, as long as we “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” ([Matthew 22:37](#)).

The next two prophecies from Jeremiah ([Jeremiah 22:29-23:6](#) and [Jeremiah 3:1-6](#)) demonstrate how false teachers (like the Pharisees) have caused the people to stray away from God. The Lord says, “You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them” ([Jeremiah 23:2](#)). However, our Lord loves us, even when we stray away. He says to the people of Israel, “But you have played the harlot with many lovers; yet return to me” ([Jeremiah 3:1](#)). Thus, even though we fall because of sin, He redeems us and allows us to come back to Him saying, “...I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be

missing...” ([Jeremiah 23:3-4](#)). Origen the Scholar explains how “this is a new kind of goodness; God receives the soul, even after harlotry, if she returns and repents from her whole heart” (Treasuries of the Fathers of the Church Series, Volume IIIId).

The next prophecy, from [Wisdom of Solomon 2:12-22](#), explains how the Lord will support a righteous man and save him from his adversaries. It is written, “For if the righteous man is God’s son, He will uphold him, and He will deliver him out of the hand of his adversaries” ([Wisdom of Solomon 2:18](#)). Thus, whenever we face tribulations, we are supported by the Lord because we are children of God through sacraments such as baptism, chrismation, eucharist, and repentance/confession. In times of tribulation, let us remember the Prayer of Thanksgiving says, “for it is You Who have given us the authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy.”

The next reading from Zechariah ([Zechariah 11:11-14](#)) is a remarkable prophecy of Judas’s betrayal of Christ—particularly for 30 pieces of silver. It is written, “Then I said to them, ‘If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.’ And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver” ([Zechariah 11:12](#)). After this, the prophecy even indicates that the 30 pieces are thrown back into the “house of the Lord,” just as Judas threw the coins back into the temple. St. Cyril of Jerusalem explains the

accuracy of this prophecy saying, “A great and unerring wisdom of the Holy Spirit! For he did not say ten or twenty but thirty, exactly the right amount” (*Catechetical Lectures*, St. Cyril of Jerusalem).

The next prophecy from Micah ([Micah 7:1-8](#)) focuses on how even when we sin, we have redemption through our Lord. The prophet explains the barbaric nature of humans saying, “The godly has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among mankind; they all lie in wait for blood, and each hunts the other with a net” ([Micah 7:2](#)). All people sin, but although we all struggle due to our weaknesses, we still have hope because of the resurrection of our Lord. When we sin and continually struggle, let us say confidently “But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me” ([Micah 7:7](#)).

Gospel Readings

In the first hour, the Church reads an account of Christ’s trial in front of Pontius Pilate from each of the four Gospels ([Matthew 27:1-14](#), [Mark 15:1-5](#), [Luke 22:66-23:12](#), and [John 18:28-40](#)). While each account is slightly different, they all display how Christ handled the situation—through humility and silence.

Rather than fighting back against the ridiculous false accusations, Christ remained silent. There was no need to argue back, he had

already taught the people all there was to teach. As St. Ephrem the Syrian explains:

“He spoke in order to teach but kept silent in the tribunal. He was not silent over that which was exalting us, but He did not struggle against those who were provoking Him. The words of His calumniators, like a crown on His head, were a source of redemption. He kept silent so that His silence would make them shout even louder, and so that His crown would be made more beautiful through all this clamor” ((*Treasures of the Fathers of the Church Series, Volume III*)).

St. John Chrysostom describes more about this:

“Because having proofs from His acts, of His power, His meekness, His gentleness, beyond number, they were willfully blind, and dealt unfairly, and the tribunal was corrupt. For these reasons then He replies to nothing but holds His peace...” (*Commentary on Matthew, Homily 86.1, St. John Chrysostom*).

This silence and humility marveled Pontius Pilate—to the point where he washed his hands of Christ’s crucifixion. However, the

stubbornness and jealousy of the people (particularly the Pharisees), eventually forced Pilate's hand into crucifying our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Liturgy of St. Gregory, we describe Christ's actions on our behalf saying:

“You showed me the power of Your authority. You granted sight to the blind. You raised the dead from the graves. You raised up human nature through the word. You revealed to me the dispensation of Your tender compassions. You endured the injustice of the wicked. You gave Your back to scourging. You surrendered Your cheeks to slapping. For my sake, O my Master, You did not turn Your face from the shame of spitting.”

Let us remember the hardships Christ endured on our behalf and the marvelously humble and peaceful manner in which He approached these hardships. If Christ can remain silent even when crowds wanted to kill Him, how much easier is it for us to remain silent and keep our peace during our relatively minute struggles in life?

Third Hour:

Prophecies

As described earlier, the third hour of Great Friday focuses on how Christ was beaten, whipped, and bruised for our sakes before eventually being crucified on the cross. They divided His garments, put a crown of thorns on His head, placed a reed in His hand, and paraded Him around Jerusalem. In terms of the readings from the Old Testament, many predict the suffering Christ endures on our behalf.

The first prophecy ([Genesis 48:1-19](#)) recounts the story of Isaac blessing Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Traditionally, the older son always receives the blessing. However, Isaac (who was blind and hard of sight) places his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh—giving the blessing to Ephraim. Joseph, thinking that his father is confused, tries to move Jacob's right hand to Manasseh. Jacob answers Joseph saying, "I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations" ([Genesis 48:19](#)). Although this prophecy may not seem related to Holy Week, St. Jerome explains that "Jacob's vision became so dim that he could not see Ephraim and Manasseh, although with the inner eye and prophetic spirit he could foresee the distant future and the Christ that was to come of his royal line" (*Epistle 68.1*, St. Jerome).

Meanwhile, because Ephraim was on Jacob's left side and Manasseh was on Jacob's right, Jacob had to cross his hands to bless them—prophesying the passion of Christ on the cross.

The next prophecy, read from [Isaiah 50:4-9](#), may sound familiar to the congregation, as parts of it are read during the Gregorian Liturgy. This prophecy is remarkably accurate to what our Lord Christ endured, "I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting" ([Isaiah 50:6](#)). It pains the heart to see how the world that our Lord loves so much rejected him. As St. Jacob of Serugh explains:

“You ignorant, how did you dare to spit on His face? How did the earth bear to watch that scene? Instead of the slave who sinned, the Master Himself bore all that shame”
(*Divine Love*, St. Jacob of Serugh).

Let us truly contemplate and appreciate the greatness of the Lord's love for us as seen through the suffering He endured.

After this, another prophecy from Isaiah ([Isaiah 3:9-15](#)) is read that described how God's chosen people would reject Christ. Isaiah writes, "Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves" ([Isaiah 3:9](#)). Many that should have accepted Christ rejected Him, while many of the Gentiles that did not know God before Christ

accepted Him. St. Justin Martyr explains this, “Indeed your hand is raised to do evil. You have killed Christ and did not repent...As for us, we pray for your sake, and for the sake of all mankind, as we were taught by Christ, the Lord, who instructed us to pray even for our enemy, and to love those who hate and curse us.”

One more prophecy is read from Isaiah ([Isaiah 63:1-7](#)) that foreshadows the brutal suffering that Christ endures. In this passage, the Holy Spirit testifies through Isaiah saying, “Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress?” ([Isaiah 63:2](#)). The redness of the wine can be compared to the blood that stained Christ’s clothes. Meanwhile “the treading also, and pressure of the winepress, is repeatedly dwelt on; because just as the drinking of wine cannot be attained to unless the bunch of grapes be first trodden and pressed, so neither could we drink the blood of Christ unless Christ had first been trampled upon and pressed” (*Epistle 62.7*, St. Cyprian). As we partake of the Eucharist every liturgy, let us remember the blood that Christ endured on our behalf.

The final prophecy of the third hour is from the book of Job ([Job 29:21-30:10](#)). In the book of Job, it is written, “they abhor me; they keep aloof from me; they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me” ([Job 30:10](#)). This spitting of the face is similar to that seen in Isaiah 50. Christ was persecuted for our sake and disrespected similar to

how Job was rejected by those around him. St. Augustine of Hippo puts it rather simply saying, “They really curse the face of Christ” (*Augustine of Hippo Annotations on Job*).

Gospel Readings

In the third hour, the Church reads an account of Christ’s handing over to the Jews and subsequent suffering from each of the four Gospels ([Matthew 27:15-26](#), [Mark 15:6-25](#), [Luke 23:13-25](#), and [John 19:1-12](#)). These Gospel readings describe many events such as the Jews choosing to release Barabbas instead of Jesus, Pilate washing his hands, and the suffering of Christ leading up to the cross.

From these readings, it is seen that the Jews present at the trial clearly chose to support Barabbas who was a prisoner, thief, and murderer over our Lord Jesus Christ, who preached peace, love, and righteousness. This decision displays the stubbornness and greed of the people—they could not admit that Christ was the Messiah, even with all the miracles and signs He performed! In a similar way, we can be stubborn and choose the desires of the world over Christ. As the Church father Theophylact explains:

“Barabbas means ‘son of the father’—’bar’ meaning son and ‘abbas’ meaning father. These Jews, therefore, demanded the son of their spiritual father, the devil, but Jesus they crucified. And to this day, there are those like them who have chosen Antichrist, the substitute messiah, the son of the father, and have rejected Christ, the true Messiah” (*TGM, Theophylact*).

Let us strive to not fall into the same temptations as the people—choosing the desires of the world over our Lord Jesus Christ. It is so easy to be enticed by these desires that we forget the amazing sacrifice our Lord did for us on the cross.

Another interesting aspect of these readings is the washing of Pilate’s hands. Pilate did this to seemingly cleanse himself of any responsibility, but, this was an act of cowardice and fear. Pilate did not care about justice—if he did, he would have released Jesus due to his clear innocence. Instead, he was afraid of a riot breaking out; thus, he granted the Jews their wish. As St. John Chrysostom explains, Pilate was “extremely cowardly and weak. He joined in their corruption. He did not stand firm against the bullying crowd or against the Jewish leadership” (*Commentary on Matthew, Homily 86.2, St. John Chrysostom*). In the face of injustice, let us remember to stand up for what is right and just, not to be swayed by pressure from others.

Finally, the most detailed aspect of these Gospel readings is the torture that our Christ endured before the cross. He was whipped on our behalf. He was beaten on our behalf. He was stripped on our behalf. He was humiliated on our behalf. A crown of thorns was placed on His head on our behalf. Yet, despite all of this, Christ's embarrassment was actually in reality an act of power, mercy, and love. As St. Augustine explains:

“What a grand spectacle! To the profane a laughingstock, to the pious a mystery. Profaneness sees a king bearing a cross instead of a scepter; piety sees a King bearing a Cross, on which He nails Himself, and afterwards to nail it on the foreheads of kings. To profane eyes, this was contemptible, which the hearts of saints would afterwards glory in”
(*Tractates on John*, Tractate 117, St. Augustine).

When thinking of Christ on the cross, let us remember not only His suffering but also the glory and power of this beautiful sacrifice He did out of His love for us.

Good Friday: 6th to 12th

Sixth Hour:

Prophecies

As described earlier, the sixth hour of Great Friday focuses on Christ's crucifixion. The overarching theme of all the prophecies read is the Cross. The humiliating death on the Cross became the throne of the Almighty God, as St. Gregory Nazianzen says, "He is lifted up and nailed to the Tree, but by the Tree of Life He restores us...He dies, but He gives life, and by His death destroys death" (*The Third Theological Oration*, St. Gregory Nazianzen).

The first prophecy ([Numbers 21:1-9](#)) is read because Moses's brazen serpent is a symbol of the Cross. The Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live" ([Numbers 21:8](#)). In the same way, when we look to the Cross, we gain eternal life through Christ. As St. Ephrem the Syrian explains, "Just as those who looked with bodily eyes at the sign which Moses fastened on the pole lived bodily, so too those who look with spiritual eyes at the body of the Messiah nailed and suspended on the cross and believe in him will live [spiritually]" (*Tatian's Diatessaron*, St. Ephrem the Syrian).

The next prophecy from Isaiah ([Isaiah 53:7-12](#)) described how Christ is the sacrificial Lamb. In the Old Testament, for sins to be forgiven, a blood sacrifice (through an animal) had to be made. Christ became this eternal blood sacrifice on our behalf, so sin no longer leads to death. As Isaiah prophesies, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth” ([Isaiah 53:7](#)). Because Christ was sacrificed on behalf of our sins, we need to be righteous to fulfill the gift of eternal salvation. As St. Gregory Nazienzen explains, “If it was for the sake of you and your sins that He numbered with transgressors, you should keep the law for His sake. Worship Him, Who was nailed on the Cross for your sake...” (*Oration on Easter 34*, St. Gregory Nazienzen).

The next two prophecies ([Isaiah 12:2-13:10](#) and [Amos 8:9-12](#)) are direct prophecies of the darkness that followed immediately after Christ’s crucifixion. Isaiah writes that on the day of the Lord, “For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light” ([Isaiah 13:10](#)). Amos similarly writes, “‘And on that day,’ declares the Lord God, ‘I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight’” ([Amos 8:9](#)).

Pauline Epistle

The sixth and ninth hours also include a reading from the Pauline Epistles in addition to the Old Testament prophecies. In the sixth hour, the reading is [Galatians 6:14-18](#). In this reading, St. Paul describes the power of the Cross, and how Jesus made the most humiliating death into one of power and glory. Because of this, St. Paul talks about *boasting* in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. What does he mean by boasting in the cross? St. John Chrysostom explains this:

“What is the boast of the Cross? That Christ for my sake took on Him the form of a slave, the enemy, the unfeeling one. Yes, He so loved me as to give Himself up to a curse for me. Who can be comparable to this!... Let us then not be ashamed of His unspeakable tenderness; He was not ashamed of being crucified for your sake, and shall you be ashamed to confess His infinite solitude?... More clearly by those wounds than by any argument, than by language, do I vindicate myself. For these wounds utter a voice louder than a trumpet against my opponents, and against those who say that I play the hypocrite in my teaching and speak what may please men. For no one who saw a soldier retiring from the battle bathed in blood and with a thousand wounds, would dare to accuse him of cowardice and treachery, seeing that he bears on his body the proofs

of his valor, and so should you, he says to judge of me”
(*Commentary on Galatians*, St. John Chrysostom).

Gospel Readings

In the sixth hour, the Church reads an account of Christ’s crucifixion from each of the four Gospels ([Matthew 27:27-45](#), [Mark 15:26-33](#), [Luke 23:26-44](#), [John 19:13-27](#)). Each Gospel focuses on certain aspects of Christ’s crucifixion.

The account from the Gospel of Matthew describes, in detail, the suffering that Christ endured. Matthew describes the events saying, “And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head and put a reed in His right hand. And kneeling before Him, they mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they spit on Him and took the reed and struck Him on the head. And when they had mocked Him, they stripped Him of the robe and put His own clothes on Him and led Him away to crucify Him” ([Matthew 27:28-31](#)). Crucifixion was the most humiliating and brutal method of execution, and Christ endured all the brutality that went along with it. However, each manner of torture that Christ endured illustrated His glory and His love for us. As St. Hilary of Poitiers explains:

“The beaten Lord is dressed in a scarlet robe, a purple cloak and a crown of thorns, and a reed is placed on His right hand. Bending their knees before Him, they mock Him. Having taken upon Himself all the infirmities of our bodies, He is covered with the scarlet blood of all the martyrs destined to reign with Him, and He is cloaked with the high honor of the prophets and patriarchs in purple cloth. He is also crowned with thorns, that is, with the former sins of the remorseful Gentiles, so that glory might derive from the destructive and useless things, plaited on His divine head, which they contrive. The sharp points of the thorns aptly pertain to the sins from which a crown of victory is woven for Christ. The reed symbolizes the emptiness and weakness of all those Gentiles, which is held firm in His grasp. His head, moreover, is struck. As I believe, not much harm was done to His head from being struck with the reed; however, the typical explanation for this is that the bodily weakness of the Gentiles that was previously held in Christ’s hand finds comfort now in God the Father, for He is the head. But amid all this, while Christ is mocked, he is being adored” (*On Matthew 33.3*, St. Hilary of Poitiers).

The account from the Gospel of Mark focuses on the mocking that Christ endured on the Cross. The people mocked Him saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three

days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross! ([Mark 15:29-30](#)). Also, the Pharisees and leaders of the Temple laughed at Jesus saying, “He saved others; He cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe” ([Mark 15:31-32](#)). The reading mentions that even those that were crucified alongside Jesus mocked Him. Jesus appeared weak to those who viewed Him. To them, how could this Man, hanging on the cross, be the Son of God? As St. Augustine explains, “Such He appeared on the cross, such when crowned with thorns did He exhibit himself, disfigured, and without comeliness, as if He had lost his power, as if not the Son of God. Such did he seem to the blind.” Little did they know that three days later He would resurrect from the dead, declaring the power of His Godhead to the entire world.

The account from the Gospel of Luke focuses on the repentance of the thief on the right hand of Christ, now known as St. Dismas (Dimas the thief). While the other thief, along with the people mocked Christ, St. Dismas shouted out saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong” ([Luke 23:40-41](#)). He then begged our Lord saying, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” ([Luke 23:42](#)). As we know, Jesus had mercy on St. Dismas, accepted his repentance, and comforted him saying, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise”

([Luke 23:43](#)). St. Cyril of Jerusalem describes the beauty of this moment saying:

“They were both transgressors, but one of them is no more; the other, who rejected salvation until the end, though his hands were tied, yet his tongue kept blaspheming... For one, it was the end of his life, but the beginning of his repentance and salvation... Remember Me, O Lord, to you I cry out; the eyes of my mind are closed but remember me! I do not say remember my deeds, for which I am frightened... Everyone is kind to his fellow traveler... I do not say remember me now, but when you come into Your kingdom. What power has illuminated your soul? Who taught you to worship the despised Who was crucified with you?” (*Catechetical Lectures*, 13.30, St. Cyril of Jerusalem).

The account from the Gospel of John focuses on the title Pilate placed on Christ’s Cross, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” ([John 19:19](#)). The Chief Priests and Scribes were furious at Pilate saying, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’ Pilate answered, ‘What I have written I have written’” ([John 19:21-22](#)). St. Ambrose contemplates this title, writing:

“The superscription is fittingly above the Cross because Christ’s kingdom does not belong to His human Body but to His divine authority. The superscription is fittingly

above the Cross, He shines above the Cross with the majesty of a king” (*Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*, St. Ambrose of Milan).

Ninth Hour:

Prophecies

As described earlier, the ninth hour of Great Friday focuses on Christ delivering up His soul to the Father. At this moment, Christ conquered death by His Death, overflowing with His selfless love for us. The two prophecies of this hour foreshadow Christ’s death on the Cross and the subsequent darkness that follows.

The first prophecy ([Jeremiah 11:18-12:13](#)) relates directly to Christ’s crucifixion on the Cross. In this prophecy, Jeremiah writes, “But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know it was against me they devised schemes, saying, ‘Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more’” ([Jeremiah 11:19](#)). In this prophecy, we see Christ as the true “gentle” Lamb being led to the slaughter. Moreover, the way Christ would be killed is through the “tree.” As Origen the Scholar explains,

“If the Lord Christ was not crucified and did not die, the grain of wheat would have stayed alone, and the multitudes would not have got fruit by Him and followed Him. But His death gave fruits, represented by all Christians. So, if

death has produced all these fruits, how much more would resurrection produce?!” (*On Jeremiah, Homily 10.1-3*, Origen the Scholar).

The next prophecy from Zechariah ([Zechariah 14:5-11](#)) foreshadows the darkness that follows the death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In the prophecy, Zechariah writes, “On that day there shall be no light, cold, or frost. And there shall be a unique day, which is known to the Lord, *neither day nor night*, but at evening time there shall be light” ([Zechariah 14:6](#)). This in detail prophecy describes how darkness would come after Christ’s death, but light would reappear in the ninth hour. Thus, there is no day or night because the sun disappeared and reappeared before the end of the day. As St. Cyril of Jerusalem explains:

“It was not day, for the sun did not shine without interruption from rising to setting, but from the sixth hour to the ninth hour there was darkness. The darkness was interposed, but God called the darkness night. Therefore, it was neither all light, so as to be called day, nor all darkness, so as to be called night; but after the ninth hour the sun shone forth” (*Catechetical Lectures, 13*, St. Cyril of Jerusalem).

Pauline Epistle

In the ninth hour, the reading for the Pauline Epistle comes from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians ([Philippians 2:4-11](#)). In this letter, St. Paul describes both the humility and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ as seen through His Death on the Cross. He writes saying, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" ([Phillipians 2:4-8](#)). Christ came down from the glory of Heaven and became man out of His selfless love for us. As St. Hilary of Poitiers explains:

"To assume the form of a slave, He emptied Himself out of obedience. He emptied Himself that is from the form of God, which means equality with God...Humility is hard, since the One Who humbles Himself has something magnificent in His nature that works against His lowering. The One Who becomes obedient, however, undertakes the act of obedience voluntarily. It is precisely through the act of humbling that He becomes obedient" (*On the Holy Trinity*, St. Hilary of Poitiers).

Moreover, from the events on the Cross, we can see how Christ honored and obeyed his Father, the ultimate fulfillment of the commandment, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” ([Exodus 20:12](#)). As St. John Chrysostom explains:

“He honored the Father all the more, not that you may honor Him less but that you may marvel all the more. Here we learn that He is truly a Son who honors His Father more than all else. No one could have honored God the Father more than God the Son. The measure of His humility corresponds with the depth of His humanity...It was a great thing, ineffably great, that He became a slave” (*Commentary on Philippians*, St. John Chrysostom).

Gospel Readings

In the ninth hour, the Church reads an account of Christ’s last moments from each of the four Gospels ([Matthew 27:46-50](#), [Mark 15:34-37](#), [Luke 23:45-46](#), [John 19:28-30](#)). At this time, we will contemplate on the way Christ yielded up His Soul.

Even in His Death on the Cross, Christ displayed His power, dominion, and authority over life and death. When humans die, the moment in which they take their last breath is out of their

control. However, during Christ's death on the Cross, he shouted with a loud voice and yielded up His soul to the Father—displaying the control He has over Life and Death. As St. Augustine explains:

“Those robbers crucified next to Him, did they breathe their last when they wanted to? They were held fast by the chains of the flesh because they were not the creators of flesh...But the Lord took on flesh in the Virgin's womb when He wished it. He came forth to humanity when He wished it. He departed from the flesh when He wished it. This is a sign of power, not of necessity” (*Tractates on John*, St. Augustine).

Moreover, St. Ambrose of Milan describes the meaning behind Christ's declaration on the Cross:

“He suitably ‘gave up’ the Spirit because He willingly gave Him up. Matthew says ‘yielded up His Spirit’ because what is yielded is spontaneous, but what is lost is unavoidable. Since this is true, he added, ‘with a loud voice.’ He did this with a glorious declaration that He descended to death for our sins. I do not blush to confess what Christ did not blush to proclaim in a loud voice. This was a clear revelation of God witnessing to the separation of the

Godhead and the flesh” (*Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*, 10.27, St. Ambrose of Milan).

Suffering and Death will always be a part of our lives. After all, we live in a fallen society due to the sin of Adam and Eve. However, as long as we truly believe that God has power and dominion over Death, we will be able to rejoice in our struggles and be comforted that our Loving God is watching over us.

Eleventh Hour:

Prophecies

As described earlier, the eleventh hour of Great Friday focuses on Christ being taken down from the Cross. The prophecies in this hour describe Christ as the Passover Lamb.

The first prophecy from Exodus ([Exodus 12:1-14, 43](#)) tells the story of the first Passover. The Lord instructs Moses to tell the Israelites in Egypt to sacrifice a Lamb and cover their doorposts with its blood. If the blood was on the doorposts, the Angel of the Lord would not kill their firstborn (the tenth plague of Egypt). The criteria for the Passover Lamb and how Christ fulfilled the same criteria can be seen below. In Exodus, the Lord tells Moses that the Passover Lamb must be:

1. Without blemish ([Exodus 12:15](#)).

2. A young male, ([v. 15](#)).
3. Examined four days from the selection of the sacrifice (10th of Nissan).
4. Slain in public.
5. Roasted in the fire ([v. 8, 9](#)).
6. Left without none of its bones broken ([v. 46](#)).
7. A saving lamb for the children of Israel, they placed its blood on the doorposts of the Israelites ([v. 7](#)).

These seven characteristics were fulfilled through the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...In this manner, the Passover lamb is a type of our beloved Lord, for He:

1. Was without blemish, in whom was found no guile or deceit ([John 1:47](#)).
2. Was a young male, estimated to be 30 years old at the start of His ministry and 33 at the time of His Crucifixion.
3. Entered into Jerusalem on the 10th of Nissan to be heavily examined by the Jews.
4. Was brutally slain on the most populated time of the year in Israel.
5. Endured the fire of sufferings, accusations, and ridicule.
6. Was crucified without any of His bones broken ([John 19:36](#)).

7. Whose blood shed on the Cross saves us all from our sin ([Romans 5:9](#)) and redeems us from our condemnation ([Colossians 1:14](#); [Hebrews 9:12-13](#); [Revelations 1:5](#))” (*The Holy Pascha: Great Friday and Bright Saturday*, Treasures of the Fathers of the Church Series, Volume 3d).

The next prophecy, from Leviticus ([Leviticus 23:5-15](#)), also describes Christ as a sacrificial Lamb. In the prophecy, it is written, “On the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the Lord” ([Leviticus 23:12](#)). Then, it is said that this burnt offering “is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings” ([Leviticus 23:14](#)). In the same way, Christ is the eternal burnt offering that gives us everlasting life through the remission of our sins.

Gospel Readings

In the eleventh hour, the Church reads an account of Christ’s crucifixion from each of the four Gospels ([Matthew 27:51-56](#), [Mark 15:38-41](#), [Luke 23:47-49](#), [John 19:31-37](#)). Each Gospel focuses on a different aspect of the moments following the death of Christ on the Cross.

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the focus is on the supernatural events that occurred. St. Matthew writes, “and behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised...” ([Matthew 27:51-53](#)). St. Ambrose of Milan explains the meaning behind the veil being torn:

“The veil is torn. This declared the division of the two peoples or the profanation of the mysteries of the synagogue. The old veil is torn so that the Church may hang the new veils of its faith. The veil of the synagogue is taken away, so that we may see the inner mysteries of religion with unveiled eyes of the mind ([2 Corinthians 3:14](#)). Even the centurion confesses the Son of God Whom he had crucified (*Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*, St. Ambrose of Milan).

St. Jerome also comments on the supernatural events, saying:

“The literal meaning of the great signs is undoubtedly that both the heaven and earth and all the things within them wished to acclaim their crucified Lord. It seems to me, however, that the trembling earth and other signs also

represent a type of believers, namely, those who once were comparable to a graveyard but who, having abandoned the errors of their former ways and having softened their stony hearts, have come to acknowledge the creator”

(Commentary on Matthew, St. Jerome).

Moreover, a major event was the transformation of the Centurion—who believed in Christ as soon as he saw all the signs. In the Gospel of Luke, it is written, “Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, ‘Certainly this man was innocent!’” ([Luke 23:47](#)).

The Gospel of John focuses on Christ’s side being pierced. When the soldiers went to check if Christ and the two thieves were dead yet, they saw that the thieves were alive, but Christ had died. So, they broke the legs of the two thieves to accelerate their death and pierced the side of Christ. This fulfilled the prophecy of David the Psalmist, “He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken” ([Psalm 34:20](#)). When his side was pierced, blood and water spewed out—symbolizing the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. St. John Chrysostom explains this:

“‘Blood and water came out’—not simply without a purpose, or by chance, did those fonts come forth, but

because by means of these two together the Church consists. And the indicated in the Mysteries know it, being by water indeed regenerated [in Baptism], and nourished by the blood and the flesh [in the Eucharist]” (*Homily 85*, St. John Chrysostom).

Twelfth Hour:

Prophecies

As described earlier, the twelfth hour of Great Friday focuses on the burial of Christ. The prophecies in this hour are about lamenting Christ’s Crucifixion on the Cross.

In the first prophecy ([Lamentations 3:1-66](#)), Jeremiah prophecies about the Burial of Christ and Him descending into Hades to free Adam and Eve from the bondage of sin. While this passage is a song of lament, filled with much grief—there also much hope in its words. Jeremiah laments saying, “He has made my flesh and my skin waste away; he has broken my bones; he has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation” ([Lamentations 3:4-5](#)). While the words being sung are graphic and seemingly hopeless; Jeremiah transitions to words of hope because the Lord gives us strength to defeat Satan. Jeremiah writes, “The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him, It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord” ([Lamentations 3:25-26](#)). Let us remember these words as we go

through our daily struggles, realizing that we are loved and supported by the Lord—as seen through the salvation He gave us through the Cross.

The next and final prophecy ([Jonah 1:10-2:7](#)) is the story of Jonah being swallowed by the large fish. In this story, Jonah is seen as a prophecy of Christ's Death and subsequent resurrection three days later. It is written that “the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights” ([Jonah 1:17](#)). In a similar manner, Christ was dead (physically) but rose from the dead three days later.

Father Tadros Malaty explains the significance of these two prophecies, “So if the Lamentations express what bitterness our sins have done to the Lord, then Jonah's hymn lifts up the partition to reveal God's victory over Hades and His redeeming work which lifts the believers to the Holies in an unspeakable glorious joy” (*Patristic Commentary on Jonah*, Father Tadros Malaty).

Gospel Readings

In the twelfth hour, the Church reads an account of Christ's burial from each of the four Gospels ([Matthew 27:57-61](#), [Mark 15:42-16:1](#), [Luke 23:50-56](#), [John 19:38-42](#)).

One important aspect to focus on is the manner in which Christ was buried—in a brand-new tomb with clean linen cloths.

Matthew writes, “And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away” ([Matthew 27:59-60](#)). This was important because this manner of burial ensured that Christ’s physical body would be preserved for His glorious resurrection three days later. Origen the Scholar explains this saying:

“He was wrapped in a clean linen shroud and put in a new tomb where no one was buried, thus preserving the body of Jesus for its glorious resurrection. But I think that this shroud was much cleaner from the time it was used to cover Christ’s body than it ever had been before. For the body of Jesus retained its own integrity, even in death, so that it cleansed everything it touched and renewed even the new tomb which had been cut from the rock...For all things which surround the body of Jesus are thereby clean and new and simply ‘great’ but surpassingly great”
(*Commentary on Matthew*, Origen the Scholar).

Will end this commentary on Good Friday with a quote from St. Gregory Nazianzen. He writes:

“Yesterday I was crucified with Christ; today I am glorified with Him. Yesterday I died with Him; today I am given life with Him. Yesterday I was buried with Him; today I rise again with Him” (*On the Holy Pasch and His Own Reluctance*, St. Gregory Nazianzen).

Let us remember this personal sacrifice that the Lord made for us. Let us remember all that He suffered on our behalf. Let us remember the power of His Crucifixion and the joy of eternal salvation that we will receive.

Bright Saturday

On Friday night, the Church partakes in Apoghamsees. This word takes its origin from the Greek word “Apocalypse” which means revelation. In this night we witness God’s salvation, as He descended into Hades through the Cross, to loosen us from the bondage of Satan. The Church spends the entire night praising and remaining by Christ while He is in the tomb. This transitional period is full of prophecies describing people who were delivered from death to life.

This night begins with Psalm 151. In this Psalm, God chose David to defeat Goliath. David who was weak yet still defeated Goliath is a symbol of our Lord Who weakened himself on the Cross and descended into Hades, yet defeated Satan. After the Psalm, the Church then sings the First Canticle from [Exodus 15](#) “Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD, saying, “I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea...” This is the praise that the Jews chanted when they crossed the Red Sea after being freed from slavery in Egypt. Likewise, we chant this Canticle in the same manner which symbolizes our freedom from death. After the Sixth hour and the beginning of the Ninth hour the entire Book of Revelation is read, as it tells us how God will take the Church from this world of pain and death and bring Her to eternal life, and is

full of praises to God for His salvation and anticipation for His return.

When the entire Book of Revelations has been read, the Divine Liturgy begins with the offering of the Lamb and the Church reads Matthew 28:1-20. In these verses we are introduced to the story of the Resurrection. Father Tadros Malaty states that the resurrection was fulfilled with the power of His authority. It was He who in obedience yielded Himself in the hand of His Father, accepting death and accepting resurrection, even though He had said “I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” In authority He rose, and the stone was there as before, as well as sealed ([John 10:18](#)). Also, Bishop Boulos El Boshy says, “Just as when He yielded up His spirit the earth shook, likewise in His Resurrection He made the earth shake, so as to declare that He who died is the One to rise.”

Let us remember that Bright Saturday (Joyous Saturday) is a transition from death to life, and is not just experienced by Christ, but rather by us as well. With the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, we are proclaiming and confessing the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and soon we will rejoice ourselves when we are freed from the curse of death alongside Christ through His Holy Resurrection.

Feast of the Resurrection

During the Church celebration of the Feast of the Resurrection Liturgy we read [John 20:1-18](#). Mary Magdalene went to the tomb very early and when she had arrived there, the stone had been removed from the entrance of the tomb. She then ran back to Simon Peter and John and told them of what has happened. Then the three ran to the tomb and entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths and the handkerchief around his head were folded. The disciples went away into their own homes, but Mary remained at the tomb weeping. When Mary turned around Jesus was there, but she didn't know it was Him. Thinking He was the gardener she asked Him if He had moved the Lord's body? Jesus responded saying "Mary!" and she turned to Jesus and said "Rabboni" which means Teacher. Jesus then said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ([John 20: 17](#)).

Jesus Christ's resurrection was a sign that the work of the Father for the salvation of the world has been completed. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world to die for our sin and He did, so that we can live through Him. When Mary said to the Lord, while thinking He is the gardener, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away" ([John 20:15](#)), she was looking for Christ's body not yet understand the

Scripture, that He must rise from the dead “For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.” ([PS.16:10](#)). Just as Mary was eager to find the Lord, we must also be eager in following Him and the example that He set for us. Jesus then says to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (Which means Teacher)” ([John 20:16](#)). The way Christ called her name was in a way that no one else could. He said her name with limitless love. Jesus is the good Shepard and He calls his flock by name, just as He called Mary’s name, and when He calls our name, we arise and follow in His footsteps.

After this Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” ([John 20:17](#)). . Mary was expressing a desire to hold on to His physical presence for fear that she would once again lose Him. Jesus’ reference to His ascension signifies that He would only be temporarily with them, and after ascension to the Father He sent the Holy Spirit (“The Helper”) so that they would not feel abandoned.

The resurrection of our Lord and Savior fulfilled the prophecies and brought salvation to the whole world. It is now our turn to hear His calling of our name and be one body in Christ in following the example that he has set for us.

