



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ April 17, 2011 ✠

Palm Sunday

The Triumphal Entrance of Our Lord into Jerusalem

Hieromartyr Symeon of Persia (341) *St. Zosimas of Solovki (1478) *St. Macarius of Corinth (1805)



☪ Holy Week ☪

✠ April 17 - Tonight ~ **5:00pm** Bridegroom Matins

✠ April 18 & 19 - Holy Monday & Tuesday ~ **6:30pm** Bridegroom Matins

✠ April 20 - Holy Wed **6:30pm** Holy Unction

✠ April 21 - Holy Thurs **10:00am** Mystical Supper Liturgy

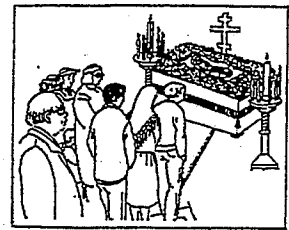
6:30pm 12 Passion Gospels

✠ Holy Friday ✠ ~ April 22 **10:00am** Royal Hours

4:00pm Vespers – Shroud to the Tomb

7:00pm Lamentations at the Tomb

✠ *All Night Vigil at the Tomb* ✠



✠ Holy Saturday ~ April 23 **10:00am** Divine Liturgy – *Pascha Prep – helpers!*

✠ Holy PASCCHA ✠ Begins Saturday, April 23 at **11:30pm** ✠

✠ Pascha Sunday April 24 **3:00pm** Paschal Agape Vespers

✠ Bright Monday April 25 **10:00am** Divine Liturgy w/ Procession

On the Passion

✠ Many indeed are the wondrous happenings of that time: God hanging from a Cross, the sun made dark, and again flaming out; for it was fitting that creation should mourn with its Creator. The Temple veil rent, blood and water flowing from His side: the one as from a man, the other as from What was above man; the earth was shaken, the rocks shattered because of the Rock; the dead risen to bear witness of the final and universal resurrection of the dead.

The happenings at the Sepulchre, and after the Sepulchre - who can fittingly recount them? Yet not one of them can be compared to the miracle of my salvation. A few drops of Blood renew the whole world, and do for all men what the rennet does for milk: joining us and binding us together."

St. Gregory the Theologian (4th C)

✠ The Logos restores human nature to itself. First, He became man and kept His will dispassionate and free from rebellion against nature, so that it did not waver in the slightest from its own natural movement even with regard to those who crucified Him; on the contrary, it chose death for their sake instead of life, thereby demonstrating the voluntary character of His Passion, rooted as it is in His love for humankind. Second, having nailed to the Cross the record of our sins, He abolished the enmity which led nature to wage an implacable war against itself, making peace and reconciling us through Himself to the Father and to one another: our will is no longer opposed to the principle of nature, but we adhere to it without deviating in either will or nature."

St. Maximos the Confessor (7th C)

FOR HOLY WEEK

HOMILY~ About the Fulfillment of the Great Prophecy

"Like a sheep led to the slaughter." (Isaiah 53:7)

Throughout the many centuries of time the discerning Prophet Isaiah foresaw the awesome sacrifice on Golgotha. From afar he saw the Lord Jesus Christ led to the slaughter as a lamb is led to the slaughter. A lamb permits itself to be led to the slaughter as it is led to the pasture: defenseless, without fear and without malice. Thus, Our Lord Christ was led to the slaughter without defense, without fear and without malice. Neither does He say: "Men, do not do this!" Neither does He question: "Why are you doing this to Me?" Neither does He condemn anyone. Neither does He protest. Neither does He become angry. Neither does He think evilly of His judges. When blood poured out over Him from the thorny wreath, He was silent. When His face was soiled from being spat upon, He was silent. When His Cross became heavy along the way, He endured. When His pain became unbearable on the Cross, He did not complain to men but to the Father. When He breathed His last, He directed His gaze and sigh toward heaven and not toward earth. For the source of His strength is heaven and not earth. The source of His consolation is in God and not in men. His true homeland is the Heavenly Kingdom and not the earthly kingdom. "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (St. John 1:29). This was the first cry of St. John the Baptist when he saw the Lord. And, behold, now on Golgotha that prophecy was fulfilled. Behold, under the weight of the sins of the entire world, the Lamb of God lay slaughtered and lifeless.

O brethren, this is a costly sacrifice even for our sins. The blood of this sinless and meek Lamb was destined for all times and all generations, from the first to the last person on earth. Christ also felt the pains on the Cross for our sins even those of the present day. He also wept in the Garden of Gethsemane for our wickedness, our weakness and our sinfulness. He also destined His blood for us. Brethren let us not then despise this indescribable costly price by which we have been redeemed. Because of these sacrifices of Christ we, indeed, have some worth as people. Without these sacrifices, or if we disavow these sacrifices, our worth, by itself alone, is equal to nothing. It is equal to smoke without a flame or a cloud without light.

O Lord, unequalled in mercy, have mercy on us also!

Worship as Exchange ~ the time we give in our worship...

As Archimandrite Zacharias of St. John's in Essex (England) notes: "The heart of worship is an exchange." The exchange that takes place in our worship of God is that we offer ourselves and all that we have (including our sin) and receive in return the very Life of God. "Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee, on behalf of all and for all." This mutual participation in the life of God and man is also the very content of our salvation. God becomes what we are, that we might become what He is.

In our liturgical life, this reality is also expressed in the exchange of time. We offer to God what we have (the time we give in our worship) and this time is exchanged: God gives us the eternity of His Pascha. Thus **we do not merely remember Pascha, we participate in Pascha.** Christ "tramples down death by death and upon those in the tombs bestows life," and in our liturgy He tramples our death by His death and grants us lives in the hopelessness of the tombs we have created for ourselves.

~ Fr. Stephen Freeman

✠ "The world has loaned us a body and because of that it wants to acquire our soul.
How can the world overpower us if we stand as soldiers of the Conqueror of the world?"

St. Nikolai of Serbia (+1956)

GREAT AND HOLY WEEK

The Theology

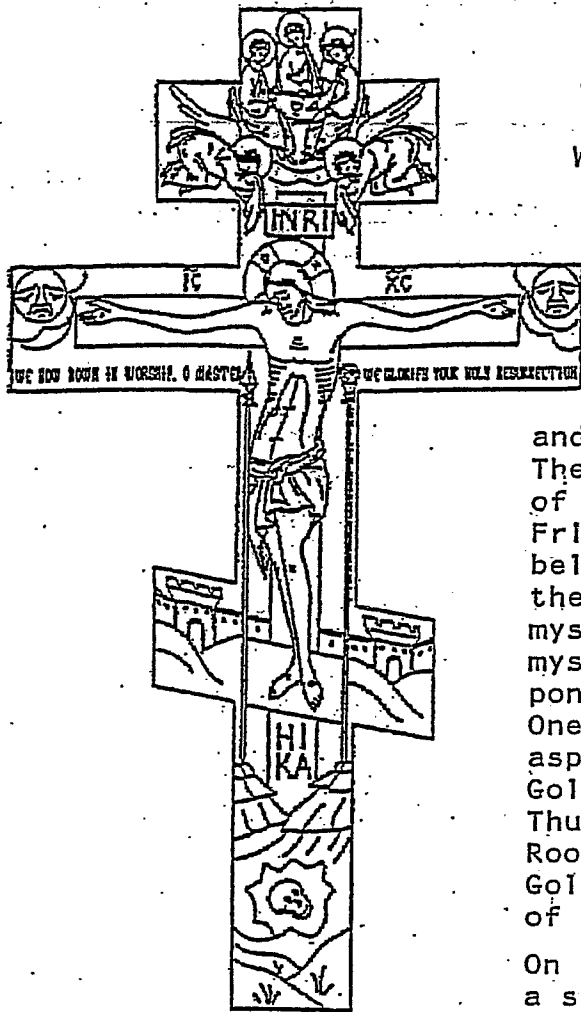
We now enter the most sacred week of the year. It starts with the feast of the Entry of our Lord into Jerusalem, also known as Palm Sunday. The joy of the raising of Lazarus who was four-days-dead, is coupled with the harrowing humiliations which are to follow.

The Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Great and Holy Week are a preparation for the Passion. They already have a strongly accented character of mourning and repentance. The Thursday, Friday and Saturday of the Great and Holy Week belong to the paschal solemnities - each one of these days reveals to us a special aspect of the mystery of Pascha. One could even say that this mystery has three aspects, each of which corresponds to a day: Thursday, Friday and Saturday. One could also say that each of these three aspects corresponds to a place: the Upper Room, Golgotha, the Holy Sepulchre. Great and Holy Thursday commemorates the mystery of the Upper Room, Great and Holy Friday the mystery of Golgotha, and Great and Holy Saturday the mystery of the tomb of Christ.

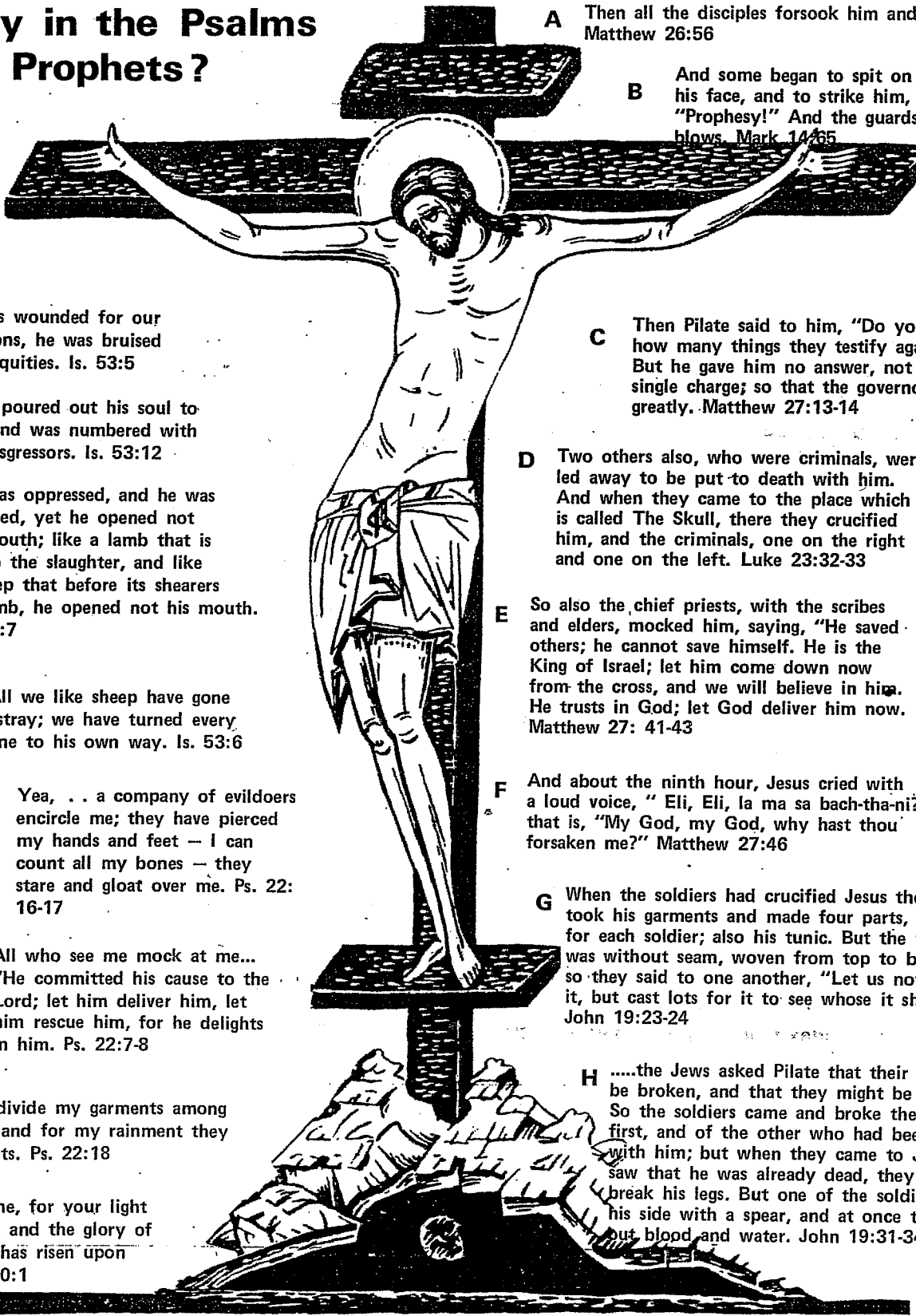
On the Thursday, in the Upper Room, Jesus, through a sacramental action, both announces and represents, consecrates and offers what is to take place

in the following days. On Friday, at Golgotha, Jesus, by His death on the Cross, accomplishes our redemption. On the Saturday, Jesus rests in the tomb; but the church already looking ahead to the feast of Resurrection Sunday, speaks to us of the victory over death that our Saviour has won. This anticipation of the Resurrection on Great and Holy Saturday allows us to say that the mystery of Christ's Resurrection, triumphantly celebrated on Pascha, already belongs, although incompletely, to the Great and Holy Week. And so this week constitutes a summary of the whole economy of salvation.

It would be a great mistake to want to concentrate on one of the aspects of the paschal mystery by separating it from the others. The word "Passover," in the traditional language of the church, does not only designate the Sunday of the Resurrection, it also covers the mystery of the Eucharist (Thursday), the mystery of the Cross (Friday) and the mystery of the empty tomb (Saturday). The Sunday of Pascha, completes the one and unique paschal mystery. This whole unity is the Christian transposition of what the Jews called "the Passover," that is to say, the passage. The elements of the Jewish mystery correspond to those of our paschal mystery. For them, there is the feast in which the lamb is eaten. There is the blood of the lamb - the sign of salvation for those houses whose doors were painted with it and whom the angel of death would spare. There is the crossing of the Red Sea - the departure from the land of Egypt and slavery - the miraculously divided waters and the passage across on dry ground and, at last, the arrival on the other side, the side of freedom and hope. The Great and Holy Week will only have its true meaning for us when we see it as a "passover," a passage from death to life!



Can you find the Crucifixion Story in the Psalms and Prophets?



A Then all the disciples forsook him and fled. Matthew 26:56

B And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophesy!" And the guards received him with blows. Mark 14:65

C Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge; so that the governor wondered greatly. Matthew 27:13-14

D Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. Luke 23:32-33

E So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now. Matthew 27: 41-43

F And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, la ma sa bach-tha-ni?" that is, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46

G When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." John 19:23-24

Hthe Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. John 19:31-34

I And entering the tomb, they say a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, "Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him." Mark 16:5-6

Match the verses from the Psalms and the Book of Isaiah with the corresponding passages in the gospel accounts of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

1 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. Is. 53:5

2 . . . he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors. Is. 53:12

3 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 dumb, he opened not his mouth. Is. 53:7

4 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way. Is. 53:6

5 Yea, . . . a company of evildoers encircle me; they have pierced my hands and feet — I can count all my bones — they stare and gloat over me. Ps. 22: 16-17

6 All who see me mock at me... "He committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him. Ps. 22:7-8

7 They divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots. Ps. 22:18

8 Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Is. 60:1

9 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? Ps. 22:1

FROM THE DEPTHS OF HELL

The Very Rev. John Breck

The final Old Testament reading for Holy Saturday vespers — Daniel 3:1-57, the story of the three young men in the fiery furnace in Babylon — is composite, drawing upon both Aramaic and Greek (Septuagint) traditions. The latter modifies and amplifies a detail the Church's patristic witnesses consider essential. That small detail is a typological image that announces the primary theme of Orthodox Pascha or Easter: the descent of Christ into the depths of hell, to liberate humanity from the powers of sin, death and corruption.

According to the Aramaic version, King Nebuchadnezzar — for unspecified reasons (the Greek declares it was because he heard the three young men singing from the midst of the flames) — asks his advisors, "Did we not cast three bound men into the furnace?" Then he adds, "Yet I see four men, unbound, walking in the midst of the fire — and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!" That descriptive phrase, "like a son of the gods," is a Semitism, signifying an angelic being. The Septuagint replaces it with the assertion, "An angel of the Lord came down into the furnace...and drove out the fiery flame."

In the view of the Church Fathers and Orthodox tradition generally, the angelic being who appears in the midst of the flames is a prophetic image of both the means and the meaning of our salvation. That powerful image points forward to and is fulfilled by the crucifixion, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

One of the most significant differences between Western (*Latin*) and Eastern (*Orthodox*) theology concerns the means by which we are redeemed from the consequences of sin — our rebellion against the person and will of God — and granted access to the blessed, transfigured existence termed by Scripture "eternal life." The Latin view — focusing on the "original sin" of the first man Adam, transmitted to successive generations like a genetic flaw — stresses the payment or obligation we have to offer to God, whether of Christ's sacrifice (Anselm's theory of "*satisfaction*") or of our good deeds (the notion of accumulated "*merits*"). These medieval themes have been significantly modified by modern Western theologians, but they continue to shape Catholic popular piety, and even that of certain Protestant confessions (the Lutheran "*theologia crucis*," for example: a "*theology of the cross*" that places primary emphasis on Christ's crucifixion, while not neglecting the resurrection). An indirect consequence of this accent is the paschal image of the risen Christ in Western tradition. There the Savior, bearing the marks of crucifixion, is usually depicted rising victorious from his tomb or sepulcher, while the guards are asleep at his feet.

In Orthodox tradition, that saying victory over death is depicted much differently. Here the themes of incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and exaltation merge in the motif of Christ's "Descent into Hell," more properly termed his "Descent into Sheol," the realm of the departed righteous who await the Savior's coming.

If the eternal Son of God, second Person of the Holy Trinity, deigned to become a man, a human being of flesh and blood, it was not in the first instance to assume the consequences of Adam's guilt through a vicarious sacrificial self-offering. He "took flesh," rather, to assume our fallen, sin-scarred "nature" — what makes us essentially human — in order to redeem and glorify that nature. This He accomplished by His sinless life and innocent death, fulfilled by His rising from the dead and His ascension or exaltation into heaven, the fullness of the presence of God. In that movement of glorification, he remained the "God-man," bearing in Himself both His eternal divinity and His human nature, restored and renewed to its original perfection and beauty. If the Son of God became (a) man, patristic tradition declares, it was to offer to us the possibility of *theōsis* or "deification," meaning a full participation in God's very life and a sharing with Him in a communion of boundless, inexhaustible love.

In this perspective, it is not we who strive to reconcile ourselves to God by appeasing

His righteous wrath. It is God Who seeks to reconcile Himself to us through the gift of His Son, the righteous innocent One, Who breaks down the wall of our sin and unrighteousness, in order to unite us through Himself to the Father. "God was in Christ," the apostle Paul declares, "reconciling the world to Himself" (II Cor. 5:19).

This is the theme so beautifully and poignantly depicted in iconography of the Resurrection or Descent into Sheol. The Crucified One, lying in the tomb on the day that will become known and celebrated as Holy Saturday, "descends" into the lower reaches of the created world, into the realm of the dead. Here He reaches out to meet and seize the outstretched hands of Adam and Eve, representatives of all humanity. The flow of Christ's robes and the position of His body make it appear that He is both descending and ascending. Enveloped in a resplendent aureole, He stands victoriously above the pit of hell, a dark hole in which Satan and Hades, symbols of sin and death, are bound fast. Death is overcome, and for those who long for eternal communion with God, salvation is at hand. It is enough to reach out and seize the hand that's offered.

As the angel descended into the fiery furnace to protect and save the three young men, so Christ descends into the farthest reaches of hell, to bring reconciliation and life to all those who seek them. In the same way, he descends into our own realm of torment and death, to enfold us in the mantle of His boundless compassion and love. We may provoke our own alienation from ultimate truth and value. We may reject the gift of life and fashion our own hell, a place of living death. Or that hell may take the form of unrelieved suffering, within ourselves or in the lives of those closest to us. Still, the metaphor holds. Into that place of darkness and pain, even into the fiery furnace of our tortured imagination, Christ descends again and again. He comes not only to release us from our suffering; He comes to bear that suffering with us and for us. He comes as Light into our darkness and as Life into our sickness and death. He comes, as He came to the three young men and to the righteous departed of the paschal icon, with outstretched hands, to embrace us, to raise us up, and to exalt us with Himself into a place, into a communion, of ineffable glory and joy.

This sacred image of Christ's paschal victory reveals the mystery, the sacramental blessing, of our salvation. And in that mystery lies our most fervent hope, and with it, the object of our deepest longing.

THE DYING THIEF

Fr. Patrick Henry Reardon

Referring to the two thieves who died on either side of Jesus, Saint Mark records that "those who were crucified with Him reviled Him" (15:32).

At least they did so for some time. During the course of the afternoon, however, one of them came to think better of the matter, as he watched our Lord hang there in patience, praying for His enemies. Saint Luke describes the scene:

Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly [lit., Amen] I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (23:39-43).

This profoundly moving scene is best considered, I believe, within both its immediate and its wider context in the Gospel of Luke. Three considerations suggest themselves with respect to Luke's immediate context. First, this scene with the thieves is the second of three times that Jesus is pronounced innocent. The first pronouncement was made by Pilate and Herod (23:14-15), and the third will issue from the lips of the centurion under the Cross (23:47). This verdict of the second thief, then, is added to the chorus of those who profess Jesus to be executed unjustly (23:41).

Second, the blasphemy by the unrepentant thief is the third and culminating instance in which the crucified Jesus is reviled in identical terms. First, there were the Jewish rulers who challenged Jesus to save Himself if He was the Messiah (23:35). Then the Gentile soldiers defied Him to save Himself, if He was a king (23:37). Finally, the unrepentant thief challenges Jesus to save Himself, adding "and us" (23:39). We observe that the same verb, "save" or *sozein*, is used in all three instances. The thief's reviling of the Lord thus forms a climax to the theme.

This sequence prepares for its foil, the scene's culminating irony, in which only one man, the "good thief," perceives the true path to salvation. He boldly grasps the salvific meaning of Jesus' death. He is the "good thief," indeed. In his final and defining act of theft, as it were, he extends his soul and clutches hold of eternal life.

Third, the encounter with the two thieves immediately precedes the death of Jesus, so that Jesus' words to the second thief, promising to meet him that day in Paradise, are His last recorded words to another human being during His earthly life. The good thief represents the repentant Church gathered at the Cross, and the words that he hears are the last thing that Jesus has to say to His people on earth.

With regard to the wider context of Luke's Gospel, there are two points particularly worthy of note in this story of the thieves. First, in drawing a contrast between the two men, Luke follows a pattern of antithesis that he has employed throughout his entire narrative. For instance, it is Luke who immediately opposes the Beatitudes with the Woes (6:20-26). It is Luke who elaborates in detail the differences between the Pharisee and the woman who came into his house (7:44-47). It is Luke, likewise, who contrasts two men who went up to the temple to pray (18:9-14), the two sons of the same father (15:27-32), the rich man and the pauper (16:19-22), the faithful and unfaithful servants (12:35-39), the leper and his nine companions (17:17), the rich donors and the poor widow (21:1-2). Luke's opposition between the two thieves, then, is the climax in a lengthy series of contrasts.

Second, Luke's good thief is the final example of individuals who confess their guilt in the hope of obtaining divine mercy. Earlier instances include the Publican in the Temple (18:13), the Prodigal Son (15:21), and the repentant woman (7:36-50). In all of these examples, Luke's narrative resonates with the Pauline emphasis on justification by faith. While in each of these examples the characters come to God with no justifying works of their own, this note is especially obvious in the thief on the cross, who turns to Jesus for mercy with literally no time left to do anything except repent and die.

Finally, this thief seems to ask for so very little. Sensing that our Lord is about to go to some destiny different from his own, he modestly pleads, "Remember me." Ah, but "the grace shown is more abundant than the request made," commented Saint Ambrose. That very day the dying thief will be with Jesus. Here the Sacred Text employs the very expression, *with*, habitually used by Saint Paul to describe eternal life. Everlasting glory consists in being *with the Lord* (Rom. 6:8; II Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:22-23; I Thess. 4:17, 5:10). It has been justly remarked that the good thief was canonized even before his death. In the words of Saint John Chrysostom, "The thief, after doing so many evil things, entered into Paradise before everyone else, because he did not become discouraged" (*Homilies of repentance* 1.15). It is hardly a wonder, therefore, that Holy Church, when chanting the evangelical Beatitudes during the Divine Liturgy, habitually uses as an antiphon the prayer of the dying thief, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

SIMON OF CYRENE

Fr. Patrick Henry Reardon

Although we know on the authority of Plutarch that every criminal condemned to crucifixion by a Roman court was obliged to carry his own cross to the place of execution, those soldiers charged with crucifying Jesus evidently believed that His weakened state would not permit Him to do so. Consequently, they obliged a "certain man...passing by" (says Mark) to carry Jesus' cross to the place of crucifixion. That man was returning to the city "from the country" (say Mark and Luke), perhaps for his midday repast. His name was Simon of Cyrene (Mt. 27:31-32; Mk. 15:20-21; Lk. 23:26).

A descendant of certain Jews who had settled on the north coast of Africa (in modern Libya) about 300 B.C., Simon doubtless belonged to that synagogue in Jerusalem particularly frequented by Cyrenian Jews who had moved back to the Holy Land (Acts 6:9). These were among the Jews responsible for the stoning of Stephen.

Bearing the cross of Jesus was not Simon's idea. He was "compelled" (says Matthew, using the same verb as in 5:41). We are surely right, however, in thinking that the event proved to be a moment of providential grace for Simon, because he certainly became a Christian. Indeed, about forty years after the event, the Evangelist Mark mentioned him as the father of two Christians well known to the Roman church for whom he was writing: "Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross."

Simon's family was cherished by the Apostle Paul, who evidently had known them a generation earlier at Jerusalem. Some of them were living in Rome when Mark and Paul wrote. Very early in 58, about seven years before Mark's Gospel was written, Paul sent Rufus and his mother greetings in Rome: "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine" (Rom. 16:13).

With respect to Simon's other son, Alexander, we are less certain. In late 1941, however, archeologists excavating the southwestern side of the Kidron Valley in Jerusalem made a stunning discovery. They uncovered a burial cave owned by a family of Cyrenian Jews, the graves in which were all earlier than the destruction of the Holy City in the summer of 70. Here the archeologists found an ossuary (bone box) with the Greek inscription, "Alexander the son of Simon." Same Simon and same Alexander? One would like to believe so, but the matter is far from certain.

However that may be, Simon of Cyrene himself lives on in the New Testament, intimately associated with the cross of Jesus. Luke's description of the event is especially instructive: "Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it *after Jesus*" (ἔπισθεν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ). Luke is the only evangelist to express the matter in this way.

In order to see the significance this expression held for Luke, it is useful to compare the text with other Lukan passages. For example, Luke 9:23: "If anyone desires to come after Me [ἑπίσω μου], let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." And 14:27: "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me [ἑπίσω μου] cannot be My disciple." Luke's latter text (particularly if we contrast it with the parallel in Matthew 10:38) shows that the bearing of the cross "after Jesus" is the true mark of discipleship. That is to say, Simon of Cyrene, bearing the cross and following after Jesus on the way to Golgotha, becomes the symbolizing embodiment of Christian discipleship.

Holy Scripture gives us no reason to think that Simon of Cyrene had been a believer in Christ before that day when Roman soldiers compelled him to assume the weight of the Holy Cross. That was the very beginning of his discipleship. He became, however, the model of those who follow Jesus to the place of His crucifixion, outside the walls of Jerusalem ("as they came out," says Matthew 27:32; "led Him out," says Mark 15:20). Carrying Jesus' cross, he shared in Jesus' shame. Simon paid heed to that exhortation of the Epistle to the Hebrews which is addressed equally to us all: "Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach" (13:12-13).





On the Sacrament of Holy Unction in Holy Week

Archbishop Lazar (Canada - retired)

**"This is foremost in the saving economy in the flesh: to bring human nature into unity with itself and with the Saviour, having destroyed the evil division, to renew the original unity, just as the best physician, by applying treatments, again binds together a body which has been broken in many places."
(St. Basil the Great, Ascetic Rules, Ch. 18)**

This year, as we approach the joyous feast of Light and Life, let us look briefly at the meaning of that divine service that occurs at the heart of Holy Week. It is certainly not without meaning that in the midst of this week, Holy Wednesday focuses on the Healing Service. Let us focus on it as well this year, for everything about the events of this week and of Pascha are centered on healing.

Salvation, as the word implies, consists in the healing and restoration of the fallen human nature. This is the message of the whole earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. Everything that He taught, every word that He spoke was certified by His miracles in which He healed the whole person, body, soul and mind. Even death itself, the ultimate illness and mark of the Fall, was healed by Christ.

Having assumed our human nature, He recapitulated all things in Himself (Eph. 1:10), healing and restoring the nature of man in Himself, having taken upon Himself our infirmities and weaknesses (Mt. 8:17).

This is why the Healing Service of Holy Wednesday is so significant for us. It sets the events of Holy Thursday and Holy Friday in proper perspective, illumining not only the meaning of Christ's earthly ministry, but the meaning of His saving Passion proclaimed in the Twelve Gospel readings of Holy Thursday. Sin consists not only in those things which directly separate us from God. Those things which cause divisions in our nature, in humanity, and turn people against one another, are also sin. We are driven to sin by the Evil One, who holds us in bondage through this powerful fear of death. Our liberation from such bondage is necessary before we can find healing for our corrupted and sinful nature.

The Healing Service calls our minds to the liberation from bondage to the Evil One which is accomplished finally by Christ's Death and Resurrection. As our beloved father St. Paul tells us, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14-15).

It is from this bondage that we are redeemed by Christ, making it possible for each of us to assimilate the new nature recapitulated in Him and become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). Again, St. Basil the Great instructs us that "He gave Himself as a ransom to death, in which we were held captive, sold under sin."

"Descending through the Cross into Hades that He might fill all things with Himself, He loosed the pangs of death. He arose on the third day, having made for all flesh a path to the resurrection from the dead" (Great Eucharistic Prayer). Not only are we liberated from this bondage to death which causes us to constantly fall short of the mark (sin) for which we were created (Rom. 5:12), but we are liberated also from the juridical law of the Old Testament, since He has blotted "...out the manuscript of ordinances that was against us, which was opposed to us, and removed it out of the way, nailing it to His cross" (Col. 2:14). The juridical law is replaced by the law of love which reveals to us the true morality of Jesus Christ.

Having given us such an understanding of the saving economy of Christ, the Holy Wednesday Healing Service maps for us the whole struggle by our Christian life and the true nature of repentance. Every new wound of sin, every occasion of missing the mark set before us, is healed by Christ in our struggle of sincere repentance. It is our liberation from bondage to the fear of death that makes this struggle possible.

Not only the nature of man is thus healed but, "... the earnest expectation of all creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For all creation was made subject to frailty, not by its own fault, but by the will of Him who so subjected it, yet with hope, because all creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth ... together until now. And not only creation, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:19-23).

Our salvation does not consist in punishment or vengeance, nor in a satisfaction paid to God the Father. Rather it is an outpouring of the co-suffering love of God for mankind which heals our fallen human nature and reunites man with God in Christ Jesus. We receive our healing little by little in our struggle for a life in Christ and participation in the renewed nature that He had provided for us.

If, therefore, we have focused on the Healing Service of Great Holy Wednesday, it is not to diminish any of the other services, but rather to provide a matrix for the contemplation of all, and of the true meaning of redemption and salvation. This is the very reason that the Healing Service is placed in the midst of Holy Week: so that we might more clearly apprehend the meaning of all that is to follow in the saving economy of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ.