

## Great & Holy Monday Con't

away..." (I Cor. 7:31).

Pascha means passover, passage. The feast of Passover was for the Jews the annual commemoration of their whole history as salvation, and of salvation as passage from the slavery of Egypt into freedom, from exile into the promised land. It was also the anticipation of the ultimate passage—into the Kingdom of God. And Christ was the fulfillment of Pascha. He performed the ultimate passage: from death into life, from this "old world" into the new world into the new time of the Kingdom. And he opened the possibility of this passage to us. Living in "this world" we can already be "not of this world," i.e. be free from slavery to death and sin, partakers of the "world to come." But for this we must also perform our own passage, we must condemn the old Adam in us, we must put on Christ in the baptismal death and have our true life hidden in God with Christ, in the "world to come...."

And thus Easter is not an annual commemoration, solemn and beautiful, of a past event. It is this Event itself shown, given to us, as always efficient, always revealing our world, our time, our life as being at their end, and announcing the Beginning of the new life.... And the function of the three first days of Holy Week is precisely to challenge us with this ultimate meaning of Pascha and to prepare us to the understanding and acceptance of it.

1. This eschatological (which means ultimate, decisive, final) challenge is revealed, first, in the common troparion of these days:

Troparion—Tone 8

Behold the Bridegroom comes at midnight, And blessed is the servant whom He shall find watching, And again unworthy is the servant whom He shall find heedless. Beware, therefore, O my soul, do not be weighed down with sleep, Lest you be given up to death and lest you be shut out of the Kingdom. But rouse yourself crying: Holy, Holy, Holy, are You, O our God! Through the Theotokos have mercy on us!

Midnight is the moment when the old day comes to its end and a new day begins. It is thus the symbol of the time in which we live as Christians. For, on the one hand, the Church is still in this world, sharing in its weaknesses and tragedies. Yet, on the other hand, her true being is not of this world, for she is the Bride of Christ and her mission is to announce and to reveal the coming of the Kingdom and of the new day. Her life

is a perpetual watching and expectation, a vigil pointed at the dawn of this new day. But we know how strong is still our attachment to the "old day," to the world with its passions and sins. We know how deeply we still belong to "this world." We have seen the light, we know Christ, we have heard about the peace and joy of the new life in Him, and yet the world holds us in its slavery. This weakness, this constant betrayal of Christ, this incapacity to give the totality of our love to the only true object of love are wonderfully expressed in the exapostilarion of these three days:

"Thy Bridal Chamber I see adorned, O my Savior And I have no wedding garment that I may enter, O Giver of life, enlighten the vesture of my soul And save me."

2. The same theme develops further in the Gospel readings of these days. First of all, the entire text of the four Gospels (up to John 13: 31) is read at the Hours (1, 3, 6 and 9). This recapitulation shows that the Cross is the climax of the whole life and ministry of Jesus, the Key to their proper understanding. Everything in the Gospel leads to this ultimate hour of Jesus and everything is to be understood in its light. Then, each service has its special Gospel lesson :

On Monday:

At Matins: Matthew 21: 18-43—the story of the fig tree, the symbol of the world created to bear spiritual fruits and failing in its response to God.

At the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts: Matthew 24: 3-35: the great eschatological discourse of Jesus. The signs and announcement of the End. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away...."

"When the Lord was going to His voluntary Passion, He said to His Apostles on the way: Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, And the Son of Man shall be delivered up As it is written of Him. Come, therefore, and let us accompany Him, With minds purified from the pleasures of this life, And let us be crucified and die with Him, That we may live with Him, And that we may hear Him say to us: I go now, not to the earthly Jerusalem to suffer, But unto My Father and your Father And My God and your God, And I will gather you up into the heavenly Jerusalem, Into the Kingdom of Heaven...." (Monday Matins)

by THE VERY REV. ALEXANDER  
SCHMEMANN



## Great and Holy Tuesday

*Commemorated on [April 11](#)*

### On Tuesday:

At Matins: Matthew 22: 15-23, 39. Condemnation of Pharisees, i.e. of the blind and hypocritical religion, of those who think they are the leaders of man and the light of the world, but who in fact “shut up the Kingdom of heaven to men.”

At the Presanctified Liturgy: Matthew 24: 36-26, 2. The End again and the parables of the End: the ten wise virgins who had enough oil in their lamps and the ten foolish ones who were not admitted to the bridal banquet; the parable of ten talents “. . . Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.” And, finally the Last Judgment.

3. These Gospel lessons are explained and elaborated in the hymnology of these days: the stichiras and the triodia (short canons of three odes each sung at Matins). One warning, one exhortation runs through all of them: the end and the judgment are approaching, let us prepare for them:

“Behold, O my soul, the Master has conferred on thee a talent Receive the gift with fear; Lend to him who gave; distribute to the poor And acquire for thyself thy Lord as thy Friend; That when He shall come in glory, Thou mayest stand on His right hand And hear His blessed voice: Enter, my servant, into the joy of thy Lord.” (Tuesday Matins)

4. Throughout the whole Lent the two books of the Old Testament read at Vespers were Genesis and Proverbs. With the beginning of Holy Week they are replaced by Exodus and Job. Exodus is the story of Israel’s liberation from Egyptian slavery, of their Passover. It prepares us for the understanding of Christ’s exodus to His Father, of His fulfillment of the whole history of salvation. Job, the Sufferer, is the Old Testament icon of Christ. This reading announces the great mystery of Christ’s sufferings, obedience and sacrifice.

5. The liturgical structure of these three days is still of the Lenten type. It includes, therefore, the prayer of Saint Ephrem the Syrian with prostrations, the augmented reading of the Psalter, the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts and the Lenten liturgical chant. We are still in the time of repentance for repentance alone makes us partakers of the Pascha of Our Lord, opens to us the doors of the Paschal banquet. And then, on Great and Holy Wednesday, as the last Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is about to be completed, after the Holy Gifts have been removed from the altar, the priest reads for the last time the Prayer of Saint Ephrem. At this moment, the preparation comes to an end. The Lord summons us now to His Last Supper.

by THE VERY REV. ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN

## Great and Holy Wednesday

*Commemorated on [April 12](#)*

On Great and Holy Wednesday, the hymns of the Bridegroom Service remind us of the sinful woman who poured precious ointment on Christ’s head at Simon the leper’s house (Mt. 26:7).

The disciples complained about the wasteful extravagance, for the myrrh could have been sold and the money given to the poor. On this same day Judas agreed to betray the Lord for thirty pieces of silver. Because the betrayal took place on Wednesday, Orthodox Christians fast on most Wednesdays during the year.

On the other hand, the Savior declared that the woman’s actions would be remembered wherever the Gospel is preached (Mt. 26:13), for she had anointed Him in preparation for His burial (Mt. 26:12).



## Great and Holy Thursday

*Commemorated on [April 13](#)*

### THURSDAY: The Last Supper

Two events shape the liturgy of Great and Holy Thursday: the Last Supper of Christ with His disciples, and the betrayal of Judas. The meaning of both is in love. The Last Supper is the ultimate revelation of God’s redeeming love for man, of love as the very essence of salvation. And the betrayal of Judas reveals that sin, death and self-destruction are also due to love, but to deviated and distorted love, love directed at that which does not deserve love. Here is the mystery of this unique day, and its liturgy, where light and darkness, joy and sorrow are so strangely mixed, challenges us with the choice on which depends the eternal destiny of each one of us. “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come... having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end...” (John 13:1). To understand the meaning of the Last Supper we must see it as the very end of the great movement of Divine Love which began with the creation of the world and is now to be consummated in the death and resurrection of Christ.

God is Love (1 John 4:8). And the first gift of Love was life. The meaning, the content of life was communion. To be alive man was to eat and to drink, to partake of the world. The world was thus Divine love made food, **Con’t Page 9**

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made Body of man. And being alive, i.e. partaking of the world, man was to be in communion with God, to have God as the meaning, the content and the end of his life. Communion with the God-given world was indeed communion with God. Man received his food from God and making it his body and his life, he offered the whole world to God, transformed it into life in God and with God. The love of God gave life to man, the love of man for God transformed this life into communion with God. This was paradise. Life in it was, indeed, eucharistic. Through man and his love for God the whole creation was to be sanctified and transformed into one all-embracing sacrament of Divine Presence and man was the priest of this sacrament.

But in sin man lost this eucharistic life. He lost it because he ceased to see the world as a means of Communion with God and his life as eucharist, as adoration and thanksgiving. . . He loves himself and the world for their own sake; he made himself the content and the end of his life. He thought that his hunger and thirst, i.e. his dependence of his life on the world—can be satisfied by the world as such, by food as such. But world and food, once they are deprived of their initial sacramental meaning—as means of communion with God, once they are not received for God's sake and filled with hunger and thirst for God, once, in other words, God is no longer, their real "content" can give no life, satisfy no hunger, for they have no life in themselves... And thus by putting his love in them, man deviated his love from the only object of all love, of all hunger, of all desires. And he died. For death is the inescapable "decomposition" of life cut from its only source and content. Man thought to find life in the world and in food, but he found death. His life became communion with death, for instead of transforming the world by faith, love, and adoration into communion with God, he submitted himself entirely to the world, he ceased to be its priest and became its slave. And by his sin the whole world was made a cemetery, where people condemned to death partook of death and "sat in the region and shadow of death" (Matt. 4:16).

But if man betrayed, God remained faithful to man. He did not "turn Himself away forever from His creature whom He had made, neither did He forget the works of His hands, but He visited him in diverse manners, through the tender compassion of His mercy" (Liturgy of Saint Basil). A new Divine work began, that of redemption and salvation. And it was fulfilled in Christ, the Son of God Who in order to restore man to his pristine beauty and to restore life as communion with God, became Man, took upon Himself our nature, with its

thirst and hunger, with its desire for and love of, life. And in Him life was revealed, given, accepted and fulfilled as total and perfect Eucharist, as total and perfect communion with God. He rejected the basic human temptation: to live "by bread alone," He revealed that God and His kingdom are the real food, the real life of man. And this perfect eucharistic Life, filled with God, and, therefore Divine and immortal, He gave to all those who would believe in Him, i.e. find in Him the meaning and the content of their lives. Such is the wonderful meaning of the Last Supper. He offered Himself as the true food of man, because the Life revealed in Him is the true Life. And thus the movement of Divine Love which began in paradise with a Divine "take, eat. . ." (for eating is life for man) comes now "unto the end" with the Divine "take, eat, this is My Body..." (for God is life of man). The Last Supper is the restoration of the paradise of bliss, of life as Eucharist and Communion.

But this hour of ultimate love is also that of the ultimate betrayal. Judas leaves the light of the Upper Room and goes into darkness. "And it was night" (John 13:30). Why does he leave? Because he loves, answers the Gospel, and his fateful love is stressed again and again in the hymns of Holy Thursday. It does not matter indeed, that he loves the "silver." Money stands here for all the deviated and distorted love which leads man into betraying God. It is, indeed, love stolen from God and Judas, therefore, is the Thief. When he does not love God and in God, man still loves and desires, for he was created to love and love is his nature, but it is then a dark and self-destroying passion and death is at its end. And each year, as we immerse ourselves into the unfathomable light and depth of Holy Thursday, the same decisive question is addressed to each one of us: do I respond to Christ's love and accept it as my life, do I follow Judas into the darkness of his night?

The liturgy of Holy Thursday includes: a) Matins, b) Vespers and, following Vespers, the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great. In the Cathedral Churches the special service of the Washing of Feet takes place after the Liturgy; while the deacon reads the Gospel, the Bishop washes the feet of twelve priests, reminding us that Christ's love is the foundation of life in the Church and shapes all relations within it. It is also on Holy Thursday that Holy Chrism is consecrated by the primates of autocephalous Churches, and this also means that the new love of Christ is the gift we receive from the Holy Spirit on the day of our entrance into the Church.

At Matins the Troparion sets the theme of the day: the opposition between the love of Christ and the "insatiable desire" of Judas.

"When the glorious disciples were illumined by washing at the Supper, Then was the impious Judas darkened with the love of silver And to the unjust judges does he betray Thee, the just Judge. Consider, o lover of **Con't Page 10**

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money, him who hanged himself because of it. Do not follow the insatiable desire which dared this against the Master, O Lord, good to all, glory to Thee."

After the Gospel reading (Luke 12:1-40) we are given the contemplation, the mystical and eternal meaning of the Last Supper in the beautiful canon of Saint Cosmas. Its last "irmos," (Ninth Ode) invites us to share in the hospitality of the Lord's banquet:

"Come, O ye faithful Let us enjoy the hospitality of the Lord and the banquet of immortality In the upper chamber with minds uplifted...."

At Vespers, the stichira on "Lord, I have cried" stress the spiritual anticlimax of Holy Thursday, the betrayal of Judas:

"Judas the slave and Knave, The disciple and traitor, The friend and fiend, Was proved by his deeds, For, as he followed the Master, Within himself he contemplated His betrayal...."

After the Entrance, three lessons from the Old Testament:

- 1) Exodus 19: 10-19. God's descent from Mount Sinai to His people as the image of God's coming in the Eucharist.
- 2) Job 38:1-23, 42:1-5, God's conversation with Job and Job's answer: "who will utter to me what I understand not? Things too great and wonderful for me, which I knew not..."—and these "great and wonderful things" are fulfilled in the gift of Christ's Body and Blood.
- 3) Isaiah 50:4-11. The beginning of the prophecies on the suffering servant of God,

The Epistle reading is from I Corinthians 11:23-32: Saint Paul's account of the Last Supper and the meaning of communion.

The Gospel reading (the longest of the year is taken from all four Gospels and is the full story of the Last Supper, the betrayal of Judas and Christ's arrest in the garden.

The Cherubic hymn and the hymn of Communion are replaced by the words of the prayer before Communion:

"Of Thy Mystical Supper, O Son of God, accept me today as a communicant, For I will not speak of Thy Mystery to Thine enemies, Neither like Judas will I give Thee a kiss; But like the thief will I confess Thee: Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom."

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### **Great and Holy Friday**

*Commemorated on [April 14](#)*

### **Great and Holy Friday**

On Great and Holy Friday, Christ died on the Cross. He gave up His spirit with the words: "It is finished" (John 19:30). These words are better understood when rendered: "It is consummated." He had accomplished the work for which His heavenly Father had sent Him into the world. He became a man in the fullest sense of the word. He accepted the baptism of repentance from John in the Jordan River. He assumed the whole human condition, experiencing all its alienation, agony, and suffering, concluding with the lowly death on the Cross. He perfectly fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

"Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he has poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." (Isaiah 53:12)

### **The Man of Sorrows**

On the Cross Jesus thus became "the man of sorrows; acquainted with grief" whom the prophet Isaiah had foretold. He was "despised and forsaken by men" and "smitten by God, and afflicted" (Isaiah 53:3-4). He became the one with "no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2). His appearance was "marred beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men" (Isaiah 52:14). All these Messianic prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus as he hung from the Cross.

As the end approached, He cried: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). This cry indicated His complete identification with the human condition. He had totally embraced the despised, forsaken and smitten condition of suffering and death—alienation from God. He was truly the man of sorrows.

Yet, it is important to note that Jesus' cry of anguish from the Cross was not a sign of His loss of faith in His Father. The words which He exclaimed are the first verse of Psalm 22, a messianic Psalm. The first part of the Psalm foretells the anguish, suffering and death of the Messiah. The second part is a song of praise to God. It predicts the final victory of the Messiah.

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