

News of March - April

1. The Holy Lent:

The Holy Lent started on Monday, February 24, until the Feast of the Resurrection on Sunday, April 20 2014.

Daily Liturgies during the Lent are as follows:

+ **Wednesday and Thursday:** 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon.

+ **Monday, Tuesday and Friday:** 12:00– 3:00 p.m.

+ **Saturday** from 8: 10 a.m.

2. Appearance of the Holy Cross:

On Wednesday, March 19, the church celebrates the Feast of the Appearance of the Holy Cross. The Liturgy will be in festal tunes of Palm Sunday. The procession of the cross takes place during matins 7:30 a.m. Vespers, Tuesday, 7 pm



3. March Famous Saints:

March 8: Martyrdom of St. Policarp (Rev. 2:8).

March 9: Departure of Pope Kyrellos 6.

March 17: Martyrdom of the Apostle Matthias.

Monday, March 17 Departure of Pope Shenouda III

March 21: Departure of Fr. Bishoy Kamel.

March 26: Departure of Fr. Mikhail Ibrahim.



4. The 33rd. Anniversary of Fr. Gawargious Kolta:



+ St. John's priests, congregation and the Board of Deacons congratulate Rev. Fr. Gawargious on his ordination in priesthood on March 15, 1981; wishing him health, strength and more fruitful service and long life. + On Feb. 16. Fr. Kolta travelled to Egypt to share some views on the Myroun Oil with the Holy Synod.

5. The 1st. Anniversary of Fr. George Aziz & Archdeacons Thomas and Antonious' Ordination:

St. John church congratulates Fr. George and Archdeacons Thomas and Antonious on their first anniversary, praying the Lord Jesus Christ to grant them every blessing in their life and ministry.



6. St. John's 25th Annual Family Convention:

St. John Church in Covina holds her Annual Family Conference during the Memorial Day long-weekend from May 24- 26, 2014. Details will be announced later.

7. H.H. Pope Tawadros II:

+ On Januaruy 5, Pope Tawadros received the President of Egypt Mr. Adly Mansour who came to the Cathedral to congratulate him and all the Copts on Christmas.



8. H.G. Bishop Serapion:

+ His Grace ordained four new Presbyters for the Diocese. + Bishop Serapion established the first church named after St. Pope Kyrillos VI in Santa Ana.

+ H.G. received recognition for his successful efforts in enhancing Interfaith Dialogue.



9. The 2nd Annual Commemoration of H.H. Pope Shenouda III:

H.G. Bishop Serapion, the Clergy and the people of the diocese of Los Angeles are holding a special prayer in commemoration of the second year of the departure of our beloved father the Thrice Blessed H. H. Pope Shenouda on Sunday, March 16, 2014 at 12:00 at St. John Church, Covina.



10. Apparition of St. Mary at her church in Zytoum, Egypt: Wednesday, April 2nd Liturgy is from 9 a.m.



11. Baptism Sunday & Lenten Luncheon:

On Sunday, April 6, St. John church celebrates Baptism Sunday; then the Annual Lenten Luncheon will follow right after the Liturgy. Tickets will be available in the Book Store on behalf of the needy.

12. Feast of Annunciation:

On Monday, April 7, the church celebrates this Major Lord's Feast; Liturgy from 8:00 - 10:00 a.m.

13. Palm Sunday: April 13

St. John Church celebrates this Major Lord's Feast on April 13, in one Liturgy. The service starts from 7:30 a.m.to 12:00 noon, followed by the general funeral until 2:00 p.m.

14. Covenant Thursday: (April 17)

Pascha prayers start at 8:00 a.m. followed by the rite of washing the feet, then the Liturgy of the Eucharist until 2:00 p.m. The evening Pasch is from 5:00 - 9:00 pm.



15. Good Friday: (April 18)

The church celebrates this great Day of Redemption and Salvation from 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

16. Feast of the Resurrection (April 20):

The Easter Liturgy will be celebrated on Saturday, April 19 from 7:00 p.m. until after mid-night, follo-wed by the Feast's Agape meal in the Church Hall.

THE 7 WORDS OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS

1 The First Word

“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

2 The Second Word

“Today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43)

3 The Third Word

“Woman, behold your son. John behold your mother” (John 19:26, 27).

4 The Fourth Word

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46).

5 The Fifth Word

“I thirst” (John 19:28).

6 The Sixth Word

“It is finished” (John 19:30).

7 The Seventh Word

“Father, into Your hands I commend My Spirit.” (Luke 23:46).

Resurrection is the Festival of Festivals



Easter is the highest holy day of our Orthodox Christian faith. Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, life has no meaning. Referring to the burial of our body after we die, Pascal said, “The last act is bloody; however fine the rest of the play. They throw dirt over your head and it is finished forever.” Without the resurrection, the ultimate end of man is nothing more than a shovel full of dirt over a dead body. Without the resurrection of Jesus, to use the words of Eric Hoffer, “we are condemned to death at birth, and life is a bus ride to the place of execution. All of our struggling and fighting is about seats on the bus, and the ride is over before we know it.”

As Father Dimitri Duddko, has written, “What sense is there if everything ends in death? A person dies and that is it. One can only really speak of life if life is eternal.” And that is why Easter is the festival of festivals for Orthodox Christianity. It is the festival of the most radical, decisive and ultimate deliverance this universe has ever seen. As one of our hymns says:

“Today hell groans and cries aloud: ‘My dominion has been swallowed up; the Shepherd has been crucified and He has raised Adam and his offspring. He who was crucified has emptied the tombs; the power of death has no more strength.’ Glory to Your Cross, O Lord, and to Your Resurrection.”

“My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?”

by H. H. Pope Shenouda III

(Matthew 27:46 & Psalm 22:1)

This is the forth word of Christ on the Cross. The statement does not mean a separation of the Divine nature of Jesus Christ from His human nature; nor does it mean that the Father has forsaken the Son. But it means that the Father has allowed Jesus “The Son” to suffer and to be tormented instead of us. We firmly believe and pray in the Holy Liturgy, that “His Divinity parted not from His Humanity neither a moment nor a twinkling of an eye.” If His Divine nature ever deserted Him, His redemption could never have been considered as infinite, rendering infinite salvation, capable of atoning for the sins of all humanity throughout the ages. As for the relationship with the Father, the latter did not forsake Him. Let us just consider this verse: “Believe Me that I am in the Father, the Father in Me” (Jn.14:11).

+ So, what is the meaning of, “Why have You forsaken Me?” It indicates only that the Father did allow the suffering and pain of the Son a SUBSTITUTE, and a REDEEMER who must bear the blame and judgment of God’s wrath over the sin of the world. That goes for the emotional torment He went through. As for the physical pain; God in His omnipotence, could have made Him insensible to pain. But if that had happened, the Crucifixion would have been null and void, for pain would never have been experienced and consequently, no penalty has been inflicted, and no redemption accomplished. It is written that, “Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him, He has put Him to grief as an offering for sin” (Isa. 53:10).

Also, the word “Forsaken” means that the suffering and pain of Crucifixion was great, real and actual. The act of abandonment was the climax of all the torment of redemption on the Cross. Here, Christ resembles a burnt offering or a sacrifice. That offering for the atonement of sin was to be consumed by fire until it turns to ashes, and fully fulfill and satisfy the Divine Justice.

A great number of theologians do believe that the Lord in saying, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me”, was reminding the Jews of the Scriptures and espe-



cially of Psalm 22, as a Messianic Psalm, which starts with the same words. They were referred to as those who, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures” (Matt. 22:29), while this Scriptures testify of Me” (Kn. 5:39).

What does Psalm 22 say about the Passion of Christ? + “They have pierced My hands and My feet” (22:16) + “I can count My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots” (Ps. 22:17, 18).

+ “A reproach of men, and despised of the people. All those who see Me, laugh Me to scorn...They shake the head, saying, He trusted in the Lord let Him rescue Him” (Ps. 22:7, 8).

That entire Psalm was fulfilled. Thus, He was able to say shortly after, “It is finished.” Therefore, “He opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” He said, “All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me” (Luke 24:44, 45).

Why did Jesus say, “My God, My God?” He said that as a representative of humanity, because “He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8). Christ represented humanity in almost everything,

He was baptized, fasted on our behalf, observed God’s law and died on the cross to represent us in death torment and the atonement of sin. He who helped everyone and has never forsaken anyone, was forsaken by all, even His Father! Through that He paid off our debt, suffered God’s wrath and emerged triumphantly.

This forth word on the cross should be a source of consolation to us when we encounter any difficulty, knowing that if God has not “Spared His own Son” for our sake, why should we grumble about whatever suffering God may allow to us (Rom. 8:32).

God's Chosen Fast

"Is it a fast that I have chosen?" (Isaiah 58:5)



by Fr. Augustinos R. Hanna

The entire chapter of Isaiah 58 is a remarkable chapter about fasting; its wrong motives, practices, conditions and the blessings of the chosen fast...

1. Wrong Motives:

It starts with God commanding Isaiah to "Cry aloud, lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgressions and their sins" (Isa. 58:1). The Lord explained that in Isaiah 1:13, when He said, "I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting (fasting)". They ask, "Why have we fasted and You have not seen?" (Isa. 58:3). Then He answered and mentioned some wrong motives and practices, "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure...indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness" (58:3, 4).

In the Old Testament we find an example and application to that, in the story of Jezebel who plotted to kill Naboth and steal his vineyard by proclaiming a fast and accused him falsely of blaspheming God and stoned him to death! (1 Kings 21:9 -15).

Another strange example in the New Testament, when "some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink (strict fast) till they had killed Paul!" (Acts 23:12). That is why God commanded the prophet Isaiah to lift up his voice like a trumpet and confront his people with their sins in order to repent first. So, repentance is the first step in God's chosen fast or else it will be in vain and rejected.



2. The Right Motives:

(1) To Be Heard On High:

"To make your voice heard on high" (Isa. 58:4). Also, listen to Ezra saying, "So we fasted and besought our God for this, and He listened to our entreaty" (Ezra 8:23). Fasting is here connected with seeking God, drawing near to God, prevailing with God. The Lord goes on to say, "Then you shall call and the Lord will answer" (Isa. 58:9). Fasting and prayer show urgency, "When you seek Me with all your heart, I will be found by you" (Jer. 29:13, 14). The Lord Jesus Christ combined fasting and prayer in His temptation in the wilderness (Matt. 4; Lk. 4). Also, in the Sermon on the Mount He talked about both (Matt. 6). Once more, He said, "However this kind (the devil) does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17: 21).

2) For Personal Sanctity:

"I humbled my soul with fasting" (Psalm 69:10); in other translation; "When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting." If humility is the basic ingredient of true holiness, the soil in which grace flourishes, is it not needful that we should, like David, humble our souls with fasting? Behind many of our sins and failures, the clash of personalities and nature, the strife and division, lies that dangerous pride of the human heart. On the negative

side pride and a too-full stomach are twins! What was the sin of Sodom? Not primarily that gross form of immorality known as sodomy, now called homosexuality. The Bible says, "This was the guilt of Sodom, pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness" (Ezek. 16:49).

Fasting, then, is a divine corrective to the pride of the human heart. It is a discipline of the body with a tendency to humble the soul. "I proclaimed a fast there, that we might humble ourselves before our God," said Ezra (8:21).

3) To Change God's Mind:

The people of Nineveh understood this fact well when they proclaimed a strict fast and repented, that it is written, "Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them and He did not do it" (Jonah 3: 10; see also Jeremiah 18:7, 8 & 1Kings 21:27). Why, then, does Scripture say that God repented, or changed His mind? This is an example of a common figure of speech in the Hebrew Scriptures by which God's person or action is viewed from the human standpoint; but as far as His character and principles are concerned, "God is not man... that He should repent" (Num. 23:19).

4) To Free the Captives:

"Is this not the fast that I have chosen; to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke" (Isa. 58:6). Years later the Lord Jesus Christ said of the scribes and Pharisees, "They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders" (Matt. 23:4), and this despite the fact that they were meticulous in the observance of their weekly fasts! God reveals through Isaiah that the nature of the fast that He has chosen is the very opposite. It is not to bring men into bondage but to loose them from it; not to be an instrument of oppression but of liberation.

Men are bound, not with steel chains or iron fetters, but with the invisible shackles of evil. They fight oppression which is not social but spiritual, even satanic. An increasingly large proportion of the younger generation is hopelessly bound by nicotine, alcohol, drugs, sex and the gambling fever. Others are deceived and entangled by satanically inspired cults and by various forms of black magic, witchcraft and spiritism. There are also Christians bound by fear, resentment, jealousy, uncleanness, wrath and unforgiving spirit. They try hard to pray and fast, yet still they are bound. St. Peter said, "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with

power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38). The Lord Jesus also said, The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor, He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives...to set at liberty those who are oppressed..." (Lk.4:18). He is the only Savior who could say, "Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

5.)For Guidance and Revelation:

"I Daniel...turned my face to the Lord God, seeking Him by prayer and supplications with fasting....Gabriel...said to me, O Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding" (Dan. 9:2,3, 21, 22). In the first chapter of Daniel we are introduced to four young Hebrews who refused to defile themselves with the king's delicacies, rich food, and with the wine which he drank, as these would have been first offered to the heathen deities. Instead they preferred "vegetables to eat and water to drink." The result was that God gave them learning, wisdom and skill in all visions and dreams" (Dan. 1:12, 17). They proved to be "ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm". So Daniel, turned for youth to a life of discipline in which fasting played a significant part (Dan. 9:2,3; 10:1-3), became one of the greatest Old Testament seers of visions and dreams.

The New Testament illustrates the same point. It was when St. Peter "Became hungry and desired something to eat" (Acts 10:10) that God gave him the vision that led to the opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles. Also, St. Paul after telling us that he was "in fastings often" (2 Cor. 11:27), he proceeded to speak in the next chapter of his "visions and revelations of the Lord." The Angelic message given to him in the Mediterranean storm came after a long period of fasting and abstinence (Acts 27:21-24). How much more, do we need revelation concerning the will of God in our daily life. The promise given long ago to those who keep God's chosen fast is still true: "Your healing shall spring forth speedily and your righteousness shall go before you. The glory of the Lord shall be your guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer, you shall cry and He will say, 'Here I am.' Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your gloom shall be as the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail" (Isa. 58:10, 11).

From the Writing of

St. John Chrysostom



Put On the Armor of God

(Eph. 6:10-18)

LET US NOT DESPAIR OF OUR SAFETY, BUT let us pray; let us supplicate; let us go on embassy to the King that is above with many tears! We have this fast, too, as an ally, and as an assistant in this good intercession.

Therefore, as when the winter is over and the summer is appearing, the sailor draws his vessel to the deep; and the soldier burnishes his arms, and makes ready his steed for the battle; and the husbandman sharpens his sickle; and the traveler boldly undertakes a long journey, and the wrestler strips and bares himself for the contest. So too, when Lent makes its appearance, like a kind of spiritual summer, let us as soldiers burnish our weapons; and as husbandmen let us sharpen our sickles; and as sailors let us order our thoughts against the waves of extravagant desires; and as travelers let us set out on the journey towards heaven; and as wrestlers let us strip for the contest. For the believer is at once a husbandman, and a sailor, and a soldier, a wrestler, and a traveler.

Hence St. Paul says, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers. Put on therefore, the whole armor of God." If a soldier, it behooves you to stand in the battle line armed at all points. Divest yourself of worldly business, and you have become a wrestler. Put on the spiritual armor, and you have become a soldier. Strip yourself of worldly cares, for the season is one of wrestling. Clothe yourself with the spiritual armor, for we have a heavy warfare to wage with demons. Therefore also it is needful we should be naked, so as to offer nothing that the Devil may take hold of, while he is wrestling with us; and to be fully armed at all points, so as on no side to receive a deadly blow. Cultivate your soul. Cut away the thorns. Sow the word of godliness. Propagate and nurse with much care the fair plants of divine wisdom, and you have become a husbandman. And Paul will say to you, "The husbandman that labors must be first partaker of the fruits". He, too, himself practiced this art. Therefore, writing to the Corinthians, he said, "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." Sharpen your sickle, which you have blunted through gluttony- sharpen it by fasting. Lay hold of the pathway which leads towards heaven; rugged and narrow as it is, lay hold of the pathway which leads towards heaven; rugged and narrow as it is, lay hold of it, and journey on. And how may you be able to do these things? By subduing the body, and bringing it into subjection. For when the way grows narrow, the corpulence that comes of gluttony is a great hindrance. Keep down the waves of inordinate desires. Repel the tempest of evil thoughts. Display much skill, and you have become a pilot. But we shall have the fast for a groundwork and instructor in all these things.

* * *

Real Fasting

I SPEAK NOT OF SUCH A FAST AS MOST persons keep, but of real fasting; not merely abstinence from meats, but from sins as well.

For the nature of a fast is such that it does not suffice to deliver those who practice it unless it is done according to a suitable law. So that when we have gone through the labor of fasting we do not lose the crown of fasting, we must understand how and in what manner it is necessary to conduct the business since the Pharisee also fasted, but afterward went away empty and destitute of the fruit of

fasting. The publican did not fast, and yet he was accepted in preference to him who had fasted in order that you may learn that fasting is unprofitable unless all other duties accompany it.

Fasting is a medicine. But like all medicines, though it be very profitable to the person who knows how to use it, it frequently becomes useless (and even harmful) in the hands of him who is skillful in its use. I have said these things not that we may disparage fasting, but that we may honor fasting. For the honor of fasting consists not in abstinence from food, but in withdrawing from sinful practices, since he who limits his fasting only to abstinence from meats is one who especially scorns fasting.

SPEAK ILL OF NO ONE

LET THE MOUTH ALSO FAST FROM disgraceful speeches. For what does it profit if we abstain from fish and fowl and yet bite and devour the brothers and sisters. The evil speaker eats the flesh of his brother and bites the body of his neighbor. Because of this Paul utters the fearful saying, "If you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another" (Gal. 5:15).

You have not fixed your teeth in his flesh, but you have fixed your slander in his soul and inflicted the wound of evil suspicion, and you have harmed in a thousand ways yourself and him and many others, for in slandering your neighbor you have made him who listens to the slander worse, for should he be a wicked person, he becomes more careless when he finds a partner in his wickedness. And should he be a just person, he is tempted to arrogance and gets puffed up, being led on by the sin of others to imagining great things concerning himself. Besides this, you have struck at the common welfare of the Church herself, for all those who hear you will not only accuse the supposed sinner, but the entire Christian community.

And so I desire to fix three precepts in your mind so that you may accomplish them during the fast: To speak ill of no one, to hold no one for an enemy, and to expel from your mouth altogether the evil habit of swearing.

For it, as the harvester in the fields comes to the end of his labors little by little, so we too if we make this rule for ourselves and in any manner come to the correct practice of these three precepts during the present Lent and commit them to the safe custody of good habit, we shall proceed with greater ease to the rest, and by this means attain to the summit of spiritual wisdom. And we shall

reap the harvest of a favorable hope in this life, and in the life to come we shall stand before Christ with great confidence and enjoy those unspeakable blessings of which, God grant, we may all be found worthy through the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom be glory to the Father and to the Holy Spirit unto ages of ages. Amen.

THE PROOF OF FASTING

Do You Fast? Give me proof of it by your works. If you see a poor man, take pity on him. If you see a friend being honored, do not envy him.

Do not let only your mouth fast, but also the eye, and the ear, and the feet, and hands, and all the members of our bodies.

Let the hands fast, by being free of avarice.

Let the feet fast, by ceasing to run after sin.

Let the eyes fast, by disciplining them not to glare at that which is sinful.

Let the ear fast...by not listening to evil talk and gossip.

Let the mouth fast from foul words and unjust criticism. For what good is it if we abstain from birds and fishes, but bite and devour our brothers?

ON READING THE Bible

WE MUST THOROUGHLY QUENCH THE darts of the devil and beat them off by continual reading of the divine Scriptures. For it is not possible, not possible for anyone to be saved without continually taking advantage of spiritual reading. Actually, we must be content, if even with continual use of the therapy, we are barely able to be saved. But when we are struck every day, if we do not use any medical care, what hope do we have of salvation?

Reading the Scriptures is a great means of security against sinning. The ignorance of Scripture is a great cliff and a deep abyss; to know nothing of the divine laws is a great betrayal of salvation. This has given birth to heresies, this has introduced a corrupt way of life, and this has put down the things above. For it is impossible, for anyone to depart without benefit if he reads continually with attention.



Lessons from **St. PETER'S DENIAL**



By Fr. Gawargious Kolta

St. Peter was one of the three disciples (James, Peter, and John) who were near to the Lord, and who were with Him during the transfiguration (Mat. 17:1), during raising Jairus' daughter who had been dead (Mk. 5:37), and in Gethsemane while the Lord prayed (Mat. 26:37). St. Peter was the one, to whom the Father revealed, that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (Mat. 16:16). St. Peter was considered one of the pillars of the church (Gal. 2:9).

When the Lord said to His disciples: "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night", St. Peter said to Him: "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble" (Mat. 26:31-33). St. Peter thought that he was able to be faithful to the Lord and would never stumble; but what he did not know about himself, his Creator knew, emphasising and saying: "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times" (Mat. 26:34). St. Peter, feeling self-conceited, said to the Lord: "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You" (Mat. 26:35).

When the officers of the chief priests laid their hands on Jesus and took Him, St. Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant (Jn. 18:10). But the Lord asked St. Peter to put his sword in its place, and

the Lord touched the servant's ear and healed him. St. Peter followed the Lord at a distance, and entered the courtyard of the high priest (Jn. 18:15). He stood with the servants and the officers and warmed himself (Jn. 18:18). St. Peter denied his discipleship to Jesus three times. Peter's denial was very painful to

the Lord, and added more agony to His physical suffering:

He denied his discipleship in front of the servants and the officers who were in the courtyard warming themselves when a servant girl said: "You also were with Jesus of Galilee", but he denied and said: "I do not know what you are saying" (Mat. 26:69, 70).

2- He denied with an oath his discipleship to the Lord in front of a maidservant who kept the door, and said: "I do not know the Man" (Mat. 26:71, 72).

3- The third denial was inside the courtyard about an hour later, when a man affirmed, saying: "Surely you also are of them, for your speech betrays you". Then he began to curse and swear, saying: "I do not know the Man" (Mat. 26:74). While he was speaking the rooster crowed, and the Lord turned and looked at St. Peter (Lk. 22:61). St. Peter remained in the darkness of denial for some time. Then he went out and wept bitterly.

We can learn many beneficial lessons from St. Peter's denial:

1- St. Peter had too much self-confidence; he believed that he would never deny the Lord, "even if I have to die with you, I will never deny You". We should not depend on our self-confidence, but on the grace of God that strengthens our weakness. St. Paul said: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls" (1 Cor. 10:12).

The Lord also said: "For without Me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5), because our sufficiency is from God. Then, I can say with St. Paul: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

2- St. Peter left His master facing the evil trial and went outside warming himself with the servants of the high priest. Just as St. Peter took his eyes off Jesus when he attempted walking on the water, and he began to drown, so now when he is questioned about Jesus, he denied knowing him and drowned into the sea of denial.

It is the same when we take off our eyes from the Lord, and His teachings, we sink in unfaithfulness and denial, through our bad deeds, thoughts and feelings. Fix your eyes on Jesus and His grace and you will not stumble.

However, after receiving the Holy Spirit he was changed and became extremely brave. He rebuked the high priests who crucified the Lord (Act. 4:10-12), and preached the Gospel faithfully. He fought the good fight for the rest of his life, and at the end he gave it up on the cross for his Master's sake. Now this was done by the power of the Holy Spirit, and not by mere human rush.

Every slack soul that stays away from Christ, and do not enter with Him, sharing His sufferings, will not be a witness for Him, but will easily deny Him.

3- St. Peter went out and wept bitterly. He judged himself after he had lied and denied his Master with an oath. His repentance was fast and sincere with tears. He did not postpone his repentance, but he went out at once, in the cold weather and wept bitterly. He had faith that God is very merciful, as He said: "Will they fall and not rise? Will one turn away and not return?" (Jer.8:4).

St. Peter returned, and thus he did not lose his position as a disciple. The tears of his repentance did not only ask forgiveness, but it also made him worthy to receive it.

Many people deny Jesus before the crowing of the rooster, when they live in the darkness of sin. However when they return and repent, God will tell them: "Come

now let us reason together ..., though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18).

4- The Lord, who knew the weakness of St. Peter and that he would deny Him, told him few comforting words: "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (Lk.22:32). St. Peter came to himself when the rooster crowed, and the Lord turned and looked at him (Lk. 22:61). His sincere repentance made the Lord accept him, and return him back to his position, as a shepherd for His flock (Jn. 21:15-17). Our Lord is very merciful and even "if we are not faithful to Him, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim.2:13).

5- St. Peter's hope saved him. Though his fall was great, yet he did not lose hope in the mercy and compassion of the Lord and so he obtained forgiveness and regained his apostleship. This was the opposite of what Judas Iscariot did. He lost his faith and hope; and accordingly his life both physically and spiritually.

In conclusion:

+ Depend upon the grace of God, and not upon yourself.

+ Fix your eyes on Jesus.

+ Repent immediately if you fall.

+ Regret your sins sincerely.

+ Have unshaken hope and confidence in God's mercy and forgiveness. , "Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me" (Mic. 7:8).

+ Hold on to the promises of God; "I prayed for you, that your faith will not fail ...".

+ Go to your father of confession and admit your sins. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness".

A Love Story

Author unknown

One day, I woke early in the morning to watch the sunrise. Ah, the beauty of God's creation is beyond description. As I watched, I praised God for His beautiful work. As I sat there, I felt the Lord's presence with me.

He asked me, "Do you love me?" I answered, "Of course, God! You are my Lord and Savior!"

Then He asked, "If you were physically handicapped, would you still love me?"

I was perplexed. I looked down upon my arms, legs and the rest of my body and wondered how many things I wouldn't be able to do, the things that I took for granted.

And I answered, "It would be tough Lord, but I would still love You." **Then the Lord said, "If you were blind, would you still love my creation?"**

How could I love something without being able to see it? Then I thought of all the blind people in the world and how many of them still love God and His creation. So I answered, "It's hard to think of it, but I would still love you."

The Lord then asked me, **"If you were deaf, would you still listen to my word?"**

How could I listen to anything being deaf? Then I understood. Listening to God's Word is not merely using our ears, but our hearts.

I answered, "It would be tough, but I would still listen to Your word." **The Lord then asked, "If you were mute, would you still praise My Name?"**

How could I praise without a voice? Then it occurred to me: God wants us to sing from our very heart and soul. It never matters what we sound like. And praising God is not always with a song, but when we are persecuted, we give God praise with our words of thanks.

So I answered, "Though I could not physically sing, I would still praise Your Name."

And the Lord asked, **"Do you really love Me?"**

With courage and a strong conviction, I answered boldly, "Yes Lord! I love You because You are the one and true God!" I thought I had answered well, but God asked, **"THEN WHY DO YOU SIN?"**

I answered, "Because I am only human. I am not perfect."

"THEN WHY IN TIMES OF PEACE DO YOU STRAY THE FURTHEST? WHY ONLY IN TIMES OF TROUBLE DO YOU PRAY THE MOST EARNEST?"

No answers. Only tears. The Lord continued: "Why only sing at fellowships and retreats? Why seek Me only in times of worship? Why ask things so selfishly?

Why ask things so unfaithfully?" The tears continued to roll down my cheeks. **"Why** are you ashamed of Me? Why are you not spreading the good news? **Why** in times of persecution, you cry to others when I offer My shoulder to cry on? **Why** make excuses when I give you opportunities to serve in My Name?"

I tried to answer, but there was no answer to give. "You are blessed with life. I made you not to throw this gift away. I have blessed you with talents to serve Me, but you continue to turn away. I have revealed My Word to you but you do not gain in knowledge. I have spoken to you but your ears were closed. I have shown My blessings to you, but your eyes were turned away. I have sent you servants, but you sat idly by as they were pushed away.

I have heard your prayers and I have answered them all. **"DO YOU TRULY LOVE ME?"**

I could not answer. How could I? I was embarrassed beyond belief. I had no excuse. What could I say to this? When I my heart had cried out and the tears had flowed, I said, "Please forgive me Lord. I am unworthy to be Your child."

The Lord answered, "That is My Grace, My child."

I asked, "Then why do you continue to forgive me? Why do You love me so?"

The Lord answered, "Because you are My creation. You are my child. I will never abandon you. When you cry, I will have compassion and cry with you. When you shout with joy, I will laugh with you. When you are down, I will encourage you. When you fall, I will raise you up. When you are tired, I will carry you. I will be with you till the end of days, and I will love you forever." Never had I cried so hard before. How could I have been so cold? How could I have hurt God as I had done?

I asked God, "How much do You love me?" The Lord stretched out His arms, and I saw His nail-pierced hands bowed down at the feet of Christ, my Savior. And for the first time, I truly prayed.

Events of the Holy Week

By Fr. Augustinos Hanna

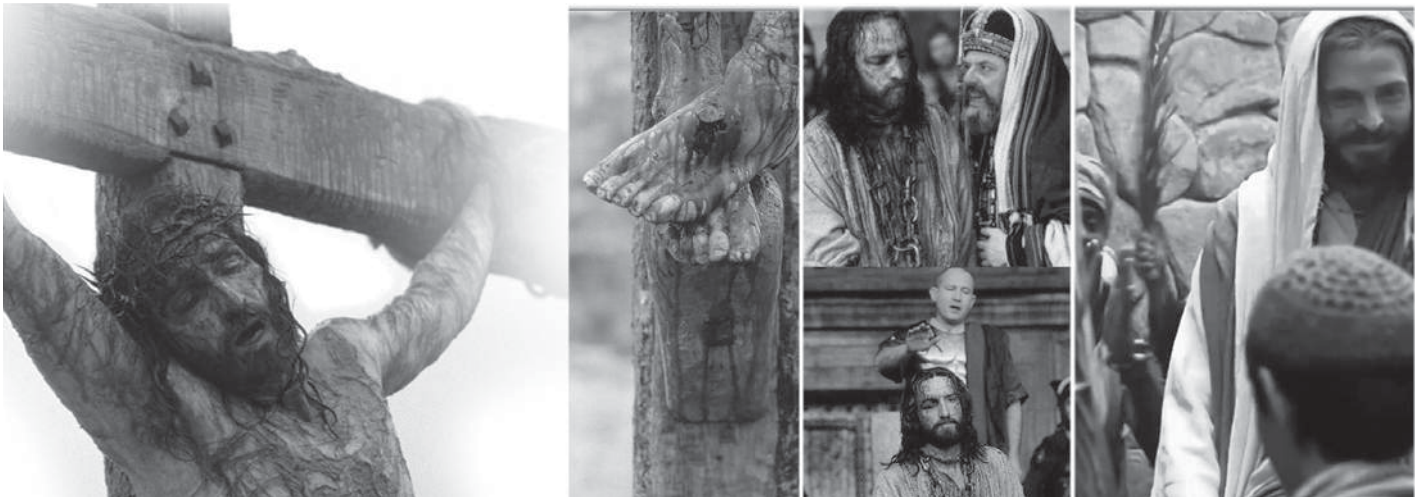
H.H. Pope Shenouda III taught us that, “All the days of the year to the Christian Orthodox believer are holy. And the 40 days of the Lent are the most holy days in the year. But the Holy Week is the holiest week in the Lent and it is the Holy of Holies.”

The gospel writers devoted many pages to the events leading up to the crucifixion of our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ. The final week of His earthly ministry began with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the “Hosan-

nas” of the crowd which changed to cries of “crucify Him” before the week was over. Jesus apparently spent most of the week teaching in the temple area during the day. His evenings were spent in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany.

Significant events during this week included the plot of the Sanhedrin, Jesus’ betrayal and arrest, the trials of Christ, His journey to Golgotha and His glorious Resurrection.

With Christ Day by Day



Day	Event	Biblical Reference
Sunday	The triumphal entry into Jerusalem	Matthew 21; Mk. 11; Lk.19 & Jn.12
Monday	+ Cleansing the temple + Cursing the fig tree	Matt. 21; Mk. 11; Lk.19 Matt. 21:18; Mk. 11:12
Tuesday	+ The Sanhedrin challenges Jesus’ authority + Jesus foretells the destruction of Jerusalem and the signs of His second coming. + The parables of the vineyard, the wedding of the king’s son, the ten virgins & the talents.	Lk. 20:1-8 Matt. 24, 25, Mk. 13, Lk.17 Matt. 20, 21, 22 & 25
Wednesday	+ Mary poured a fragrant oil on the head of Jesus + Judas bargains and conspires to betray Jesus	Matt. 26:7; Jn. 12:2-7 Matt. 26: 14-16
Thursday	+ Jesus washes His disciples’ feet; institutes Last Supper (Eucharist), the farewell speech; long prayer + Christ’s sorrow and prayer in Gethsemane + The arrest of Christ + Peter denies Jesus three times	Jn. 13 - 17 Matt. 26:36-40; Lk. 22 Matt. 26; Lk. 22; Jn. 18 Matt. 26:69; Lk. 22:57
Friday	+ The trials of Jesus and His crucifixion	Matt. 27; Mk. 15; Lk. 23 & Jn. 19
Sunday	+ The resurrection of Christ from the dead	Matt. 28; Mk. 16; Lk. 24 & Jn. 20

10 Lessons from Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday is one of the Lord's Major Feasts and one of the most cheerful occasions to the children of God from their early childhood. Here are some of its lessons:

1. Four Prophecies Fulfilled:

Review these prophecies (Genesis 49:9-12; Zechariah 9:9-12; Psalm 8:2; Psalm 118: 24-26).

2. Jesus Christ is God:

The multitudes cried out saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt. 21: 9).

The word "Hosanna" (Aramaic) means "Save us now." The mere name of Jesus means, "God Saves"; "Because He saves His people from their sins" (Matt.1:21). And God is the only Savior.

3. Christ is the King:

The prophecy says, "Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9, Matt. 21:4). Jesus is the "King of Kings and the Lord of Lords" (Rev. 19:16). He is the "King of Glory", the "King of Righteousness", and the "King of Peace". Do we crown Him a King on our lives, home and submit to Him in love, obedience, loyalty and service?

4. Christ is the Humble Savior:

The prophecy describes Him, "Lowly and riding on a donkey." The Lord Jesus didn't use a horse as the military commanders do, but only a donkey as a symbol of peace and humility. "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matt.11: 29).

4. Christ's Courage:

His meekness did not contradict His courage. He was bold as a lion when He knew that His enemies were plotting to kill Him and entered Jerusalem openly in a great procession! Moreover, He entered the Temple and cleansed it driving out all those who bought and sold and overturned the tables of the money-changers." He wants His followers to witness to the truth courageously.

5. Jesus is Just and Victorious:

Jesus is "just and faithful to forgive us" (1 John 1:9). He is the conqueror of sin, death, Satan and hell. "Thanks to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ" (2 Cor 2:14).



6. He Needed a Donkey:

"And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them' " (Matt. 21:3). Isn't it amazing that the Lord God, the Creator of the universe, is in need of a weak donkey?! In the story of Jonah, the Lord needed the sea, the wind, the whale, the tree and even a worm to serve Him, so how much more He will need you and me?

7. The Palm Branches Glorify Him:

The multitudes cut down branches from the palm trees and greeted Jesus. It is written that "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree" (Ps.92:12). The palm tree stands for height, uprightness, joy, purity, fruits, peace and victory. It repays good for evil, when boys throw stones at it, it gives them dates! By this resemblance we can glorify God.

8. The Message of the Garments:

"The multitudes spread their garments on Christ's way". That was the red carpet of the time to receive the kings. We also still can do the same, but in a different way. Giving our garments to the needy and the naked is Christ's commandment. He said, "I was naked and you clothed Me" (Matt. 25:36; see also Luke 3:11).

9. The Children's Praises:

"The children cried out saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matt.21:15). Those children expressed their joy and faith by singing and praising the Lord, as it is said, "Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise" (Matt. 21:16).

Let us not under-estimate our children but teach them how to sing hymns and spiritual songs and memorize psalms and golden verses from the Bible to praise God and glorify His blessed name. That will be much better than the cheep carnal songs which they contract from the radio; TV, cell phone and computer.

The Barren Fig Tree

By Fr. Augustinos Hanna



One of the famous events that took place in Monday morning during the Holy Week; was the story of the fig tree. It is mentioned in the first two gospels Matthew 21 and Mark 11. (A good way to remember its reference, in both; it is in Matthew 21:21 & in Mark 11:11)!

The fig tree was one of the favorite trees in the Old Testament. The picture of the Promised Land was the picture of “a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees” (again notice the reference: Deut. 8:8 & Micah 4:4). It showed the rich fertility of the land (Numbers 13:23). In the time of Solomon, it was mentioned to show peace and prosperity ‘every man will sit under his own vine and his own fig tree’ (1 Kings 4:25 and also Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10).

When the Bible wanted to show God’s wrath, it was said that He would smite and destroy the fig trees (Psalm 105:33; Jer. 8:13 Hosea 2:12). So, the fig tree is the symbol of fertility and peace and prosperity, and it was a symbol of the nation of Israel (Matt. 24:32).

The story of the fig tree is a puzzle:

How come Jesus curse?

How come He curses a tree while curse is a punishment that needs a sane person who has mind and free will to be responsible for his actions?

The problem seems more complicated when Mark tells us; “it was not the season for figs”!

Therefore, in order to understand the situation, we must know some background of the fig tree.

The fig tree is unique in that it bears two full crops in the year. The first is borne on the old wood. Quite early in the year little green knobs appear at the end of the branches. They are called Paggim and they will one day be the figs. These fruit buds come in April but they are quite uneatable. Bit by bit the leaves and the flowers open out, and another unique thing about the fig is that it is in full fruit and full leaf and full flower all at the same time; that happens by June. No fig tree ever bore fruit in April; that is too early. The process is then repeated with the new wood; and the second crop comes in September. The strangest thing in this story, it tells of a fig tree in full leaf in April. Jesus was at Jerusalem for the Passover; the Passover fell on 15th of April. It is also strange that Jesus looked for figs on the tree where no figs could possibly be; and Mark says, “For it was not the season for figs” (Mk. 11:13). So, since there were leaves that assume automatically that there are figs.

Brief Lessons:

1. Jesus was hungry:

This shows the Humanity of Christ; for He is full God and full man, God was manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16).

2. Hypocrisy:

Leaves without fruits means there is something wrong in the tree against its nature, and a contradiction between the outer appearance and the reality and this what hypocrisy is (Matt. 23).

3. Barrenness & Fruitlessness (Luke 13):

God created trees to be fruitful or else they should be cut off. The Divine law requires, as St. John the Baptist put it this way: “Bear fruits worthy of repentance, for the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matt. 3: 8, 10)

4. Bad and sour fruits:

This is equal to fruitlessness and even worse. God has done His best to make you fruitful and gave you the opportunity to bear good fruits. He feels sad and disappointed when you betray His design. Listen to Him saying: “Judge please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it. Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? (Isa. 5:1-7).

5. False excuses:

When Adam and Eve fell in sin in the Garden of Eden and felt naked, they tried to cover themselves with fig leaves and created false excuses, but these did not work and did not exempt them from punishment. From that moment, the fig leaves stood for false excuses. “Therefore, you are inexcusable, O man” (Rom.2:1).

6. The characteristics of the required perfect fruits:

These are the qualities, which God requires of us:

Good fruits (Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8).

Plenty fruits (John 15: 8)

Continuous fruits (John 15:16).

8. How can we bear these good spiritual fruits?

1) Abiding in Christ (Jn. 15), through the daily reading and studying the word of God (Jn.8:30)

2) Being filled with the Holy Spirit and His fruits, which are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22,23).

3) Having communion regularly (John 6:56).

4) Investing our talents in serving God (Matt. 25:14-30)

From Good Friday to Easter Sunday



By Mark Hanna

This “article” was an email that I had E-mailed to a couple of my law school professors in 1996. The subject line was the title of this article. This email was a brief summary of just how awesome our Church is in commemorating the passion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and in celebrating His triumphant Resurrection. Both professors were in awe.

TODAY WAS GOOD FRIDAY FOR ALL THE Orthodox Churches all around the world. In my church, the Coptic (Egyptian Orthodox Church) the entire day is spent in Church. Service begins from 8:00 AM and ends at 6:00 PM. The church follows Christ hour by hour through the day of his crucifixion from the trial to His crucifixion and burial.

The Old Testament prophecies of all these events are read event by event and their fulfillment in the Gospel readings out of the four Gospels, event by event according to the hour the church is commemorating. Throughout the service, the chanters chant hymns in Coptic, Greek, English and Arabic in sorrowful tunes.

All Holy Week is the same as Good Friday in the sense that the church follows the events of Christ’s final week on earth event by event, reading the prophecies and their corresponding fulfillment’s in the Gospels. Throughout the Holy Week services the main hymn chanted every

hour proclaims:

“Thine is the Power and the Glory, the blessing and the might forever Amen, Emmanuel our God and our King. Thine is the Power and the Glory and blessing and the might forever Amen, my Lord Jesus Christ my Good Savior. The Lord is my strength, my praise and has become my salvation. Thine is the Power and the Glory, the blessing and the might, forever, Amen.”

This hymn is chanted in Coptic, English and Arabic. During all of Holy Week the church is draped in black linens and coverings on the lecterns, pillars, etc., to show that this is a sorrowful time when created humanity killed its Creator and Redeemer.

The Good Friday service ends with the Priest taking the Icon of Christ being taken down from the Cross, and puts it in white linen. The Priest then takes all the flowers that were brought by the believers to decorate the church on this occasion and puts them on the icon. He adds spices, ointments and fragrances to the flowers on top of the icon and then wraps the Icon with the Linen as Christ was buried and His body put in a shroud. Two lit candles are placed on the right and left of the Icon and kept lit until the Midnight Resurrection Liturgy past midnight on Sunday (just past midnight on Saturday).

At the end of the Good Friday Service everyone goes home for a few hours and return again at 11:00 PM for The Apocalypse Vigil where all the congregation stay in Church with Christ while He is in the tomb. The book of Revelation is read by the entire congregation during this vigil along with processions around the Church, chants and praises. The focus of this service is on Christ's final victory over Satan and the everlasting home of the believers in the New Jerusalem where the Crucified Christ reigns victoriously. Of special significance is Christ's message to each of the angels of the seven churches of Asia Minor.

The Apocalypse Vigil service concludes with a Liturgy which begins at 4:00 A.M. Saturday morning and ends at 6:00 A.M. This Liturgy is a commemoration of a miracle which occurred during the Ottoman domination of the middle-east in the late 1800's. One of the Muslim rulers (Ibrahim Pasha), disbelieved the events of the resurrection of Christ and wanted to stop the annual pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It happened one morning that he went himself to see what the big deal was about and as he tried to enter into the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem, where Christ's tomb is, a blinding light and fire shown out of the two huge pillars at the entrance of the Church close to the Holy Tomb. Since then this Saturday has been called in the Orthodox Churches as Bright Saturday. Prior to the Apocalypse Vigil, the black linens which covered the church all week are taken down and replaced by white ones with red crosses in the center. White stands for the color of purity, joy, victory, peace, as Christ bestowed those on all humanity. The red crosses in the center remind us that our salvation was bought at the costly price of Christ's own precious blood and offered freely to all those who believe in Him. These white linens remain hung until Pentecost 50 days later. Again, everyone goes home after this service and return to the church once more for the Easter Liturgy which begins at 8:00 P.M. on Saturday.

At 9:00 P.M. the lights are turned off in the church. All the congregation hold candles in their hands and the Resurrection Drama is reenacted between the priest who stands in the sanctuary and one of the chanters who stands outside the sanctuary (in all Orthodox Churches an Inconstasis or Icon-bearer separates the sanctuary and the nave of the church — the Royal Gate is in the center of the Inconstasis and is shut at this point in the service).

The Resurrection Drama is chanted by a chanter who begins by saying, in Greek "Xhristos Anesti" and in English, "Christ is Risen," -- the Priest replies "indeed He is Risen" (3 times). The Chanter then chants the words of Psalm 24: 7-10:

"Lift up your gates, you princes, and be lifted up you

everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in (repeated 3 times)."

The priest responds by asking, "Who is this King of Glory?" Finally the chanter responds,

"The Lord who is strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in war, He is the King of Glory."

At this point a loud noise is heard in the Church (this sound commemorates the rolling of the heavy stone at the door of the tomb and the earthquake which occurred at that time), the lights are turned on, the curtain is opened and the entire choir of deacons and chanters begin the Resurrection Procession two and one half times around the inside of the Church. The Priests at this time open the shroud which had been placed on the altar since Good Friday and take out the Icon which had been buried under the fragrant ointments and flowers. The Icon's bottom side is another Icon of the Christ's resurrection. The Priest holds it up and gives it to one of the deacons who walks just ahead of the priest holding the icon. The priest walks behind the deacons censing the resurrection icon as he goes around the Church. This procession is conducted while the congregation along with the Chanters chant the Greek hymn "Xhristos Anesti" or: "Christ is Risen from the Dead, by His death conquering death, and to those in the tombs He bestowed eternal life."

This is an extremely ancient hymn sung in every Orthodox Church around the world. The Gospel of the Resurrection account according to St. John is chanted, followed by the sermon, the liturgy of the faithful, and finally the congregation partakes of Christ's Holy Body and Precious Blood in Holy Communion.

For the following fifty days until the Feast of Pentecost, the church chants jubilant tunes which replace the sorrowful tunes of Holy Week and the 40 days of Lent. All Orthodox believers greet one another only by saying,

"Xhristos Anesti" or "Christ is Risen," response to which is, "Alithos Anesti" or "He is Risen indeed." This method of greeting has been used by all the Christians since the first century, today only Orthodox Churches still practice this. The Church says, "Christ is Risen" rather than "Christ has Risen," since Christ's Resurrection is everlasting, it is a continual victory over death and sin which had overtaken all humanity.

This is merely a summary of the events of Holy Week and the Glorious Feast of the Resurrection. In my opinion, the Orthodox Church is nothing short than Heaven on Earth.

Christ is Risen, He is Risen indeed!

Calvary

The World's Greatest Meeting Place

Calvary stands in the center of all the purposes of God; and it is fitting that around the cross men and women of all races should meet in unity of spirit. The Christ of the Cross-, and the Cross of Christ, represents the greatest meeting place in the world

A Place of Revelation

With amazement shining in their eyes, the centurion and the other people watched the Savior, and marveled at the things they witnessed. That He could ask His Father to forgive the apparently unpardonable crime, indicated virtue of high degree; and it was not a cause for amazement when the centurion suddenly exclaimed, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54). No man can intelligently listen in the shadow of Calvary's Cross and not increase his knowledge of the One who died there. The small green hill is great from front, which to view the heart of God



A Place of Supplication

And the thief said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me' when You come into Your kingdom'" (Luke 23:42). It is highly improbable that this unfortunate man had ever had previous contacts with the Lord Jesus. His former habits had been characterized by vice, and his companions had been men of ill reputation. Losing his grasp upon the finer things of life, he had drifted on tides of evil. Then in the closing moments of his life, he met the Savior. They were fellow travelers on the road of sorrow. Indescribable charm emanated from the soul of Christ, and beneath its gentle power the criminal felt, the pull of another world. His eyesight was remarkable good-he looked at the dying Jesus, and saw a king reigning in glory. He had never been so near to royalty, and he made splendid use of the occasion

A Place of Meditation

And sitting down, they kept watch Him there" (Matt. 27:36). Amid the noisy clamor of that crowd who had come to stare at the executions, a company of men sat

down patiently to watch the suffering "prophet". They were anxious to see every detail of His agony and sufferings, and probably long afterward they were able to recount all the events of that fateful afternoon. Yet mortal eyes could not see the greatest vision of that day.

In that holy place of meditation many have since sat down to think, and during the course of their contemplations they have discovered the hill called Calvary to be a Jacob's ladder-a means of ascending into heaven

A Place of Co-operation

Now there stood by the Cross of Jesus" His mother...When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He said unto His mother, 'Woman, behold Your son!' Then He said to His disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her into his own

home" (John 19:25-27). St. John was more privileged than all the other disciples, for into his faithful care the Lord Jesus entrusted His greatest earthly treasure. The disciple was commissioned to take his Lord's place in the life of the sorrowing Mary. The privilege carried heavy responsibilities, for not every disciple would be sufficiently trustworthy for this great task. The Lord knew John would not fail Him; and His mother, dearest and best of all earthly friends, would be safe in the care of the beloved apostle. Would my standard of loyalty beget such confidence

A Place of Adoration

And they sang a new song, saying, You are worthy to" take the scroll and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every .(tribe, and tongue and people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9) When we reach heaven, many of our former experiences will undoubtedly have been forgotten; yet the Cross-will remain in our thoughts forever. We shall know our Redeemer when we reach the other side-we shall know Him by the nail prints in His hands. We shall realize also .that our debt of love will never be repaid God forbid that I should boast except in the Cross of our" Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified (to me and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14

Bearing their Cross Proudly after Christ

"They are Christians, Let them Die!"

Attacks in Egypt create need for Medical Care

From Voice of the Martyrs' Mag



Attacks in Egypt Create Need for Medical Care
Special Report by the Voice of the Martyrs' Dr. Jim
April 5 and 6, were costly days for Coptic believers in Khosous, Egypt. Armed with stones, bottles filled with gasoline, and shotguns, radical Muslims (Brotherhood) attacked Christians, churches and businesses owned by Christians. The second attack came during the funeral for those martyred during the first

Immediately upon hearing of the brutal assaults, I began making travel arrangements. Two days later, I was in Cairo, Egypt to tend to our wounded family members in Christ

The Hippocratic Oath means little to some Muslim doctors in Egypt! Muslim medical staff often neglects or provide substandard care for non-Muslims. The attitude of many is, "They are Christians. Let them die." Our presence and intervention were critical to getting our brothers and sisters the best care

As I entered one room with our Egyptian staff member, my heart broke. The patient's wound was dressed so poorly that I doubted it was done by anyone with even a crash course in first aid. His neglected colostomy bag was overflowing into his wound. Our brother, Meelad, had survived a gunshot wound but now could easily die from preventable infection. Meelad told me in private that I had not even

seen the worst of it. As the doctors and nurses saw our concern for Meelad, they seemed embarrassed and were shamed into helping their patient. I knew we had to move from room to room quickly, making sure the others were receiving the care they desperately needed. One brother, Helal Saber, had been badly burned. He was walking down the street with his fiancée when a group of Muslims stopped him and asked one simple question. "Are you a Muslim or a Christian?" With attacks going on throughout the neighborhood, surely Helal must have known what might be in store for anyone with the "wrong" answer. But he bravely answered, "I am a Christian," and refused to deny Christ. The men doused him with gasoline and set him alight. Helal was burned on over 85 percent of his body, and though I planned to see him, he died and went to be with the Lord before I arrived

At another hospital we met Amir, who had also suffered a gunshot wound. It took God's grace for me even to get into the ICU to see him. The doctors had provided excellent medical treatment for Amir but had refused to meet with his wife and family. Amir's wife was obviously panicking. Even if her husband survived, he risked being arrested, as other wounded Christians had been. I could hardly hold back tears as I spoke with the young wife and mother of a young baby

I did my best to treat as many patients as possible. I met with their loved ones and prayed with them. I have never been so grateful for God's provision in the face of evil and hostility

During my residency I was known as "Iceman" because of my self-control under pressure. Yet in Egypt, I struggled to keep myself composed in the presence of these precious saints

It is difficult to believe what happens to Christians there. However, in spite of the prevailing darkness, I clearly saw the love of Jesus Christ shining brightly. And in the midst of such evil, the church is growing, and many Muslims are quietly coming to know Christ



EASTER SYMBOLS

Among the symbols for Easter, we will consider the butterfly, the Easter lily, the Easter egg, the phoenix, pelican, the lamb and the peacock



1. The butterfly is a symbol of the resurrection and eternal life because it emerges with a colorful, glorified body able to soar into the sky, from the cocoon (the tomb), which in turn comes from the caterpillar, and the caterpillar from the egg.

2. The Easter lily is a common symbol of Easter, used in Easter services of worship. It blooms around Easter every year.



3. The phoenix is a popular symbol of Christ's resurrection, or the resurrection of those who fall asleep in Him. The phoenix is an imaginary bird, resembling an eagle, which is said to live five hundred years in the Arabian Desert.



4. Pelican

A fire, but rises then consume it again, fresh and beautiful, from its own ashes. It is usually pictured above flames.

The symbolism of the pelican-in-her piety rests upon a story often given, that the pelican tears open her breast and feeds her young with her own life blood in times of famine. It is a symbol of Jesus Christ and His atonement on the cross.

5. The peacock has also been used to symbolize eternal life, resurrection, and immortality, because of the annual renewal of its beautiful plumage. But in recent times



the peacock is more frequently thought of in connection with pride and vanity because of its long, richly colored tail-feathers, which it so proudly displays.



6. The Lamb of God: Out of the Hebrew sacrificial system, Christian application is made of the lamb as the symbol of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist said of Him, "Behold the Lamb of

God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Similar reference is made in the book of Revelation (5:6), and subsequently in the great hymns and prayers of the Church. Quite often the symbol of the lamb is found in one form or another on communion ware and liturgical hangings. Sometimes the lamb carries a resurrection banner, or a white flag with a red cross on it. When the lamb is standing, suggestion is given that the Lamb of God is triumphant, risen.

7. The Easter egg: On the front wall of the Russian Orthodox Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Jerusalem, there is a beautiful painting that depicts St. Mary explaining to Emperor Tiberius how Christ rose from the dead. She holds an egg as a demonstration, how the shell breaks and a living baby chicken comes out of it.

