

HOLY WEDNESDAY

April 15, 2020



On this day we keep a strict fast.

Begin and end the day with the Trisagion Prayers and the Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian, as found on the concluding pages of the Bridegroom Orthros service.

Behold, the Bridegroom cometh at midnight, and blessed is the servant whom He shall find awake. But he whom He shall find neglectful is verily unworthy. Behold, therefore, my soul: beware, lest thou fallest into deep slumber, and the door of the kingdom be closed against thee, and thou be delivered unto death. But be thou wakeful, crying: Holy! Holy! Holy art Thou, O God! Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, have mercy on us.

Oikos

The shameless woman of old, suddenly appeared chaste, despising her horrible deeds of sin and the pleasures of the body, contemplating her great shame and the condemnation of punishment which the adulterous and insolent, of whom I am first, endure. I tremble thereat; yet I who am ignorant am confirmed in my evil habits. But the adulterous woman trembled with fear, and hastened to her Rescuer, crying, O Lover of mankind, rescue me from the mire of my deeds.

Synaxarion

THE MORE ACCURATE and exacting of the commentators on the four Gospels say that two women anointed the Lord, one long before His Passion, and one a few days before. One of these was a harlot, while the other was a chaste, virtuous woman. On this day the Church commemorates this act of piety and righteousness which proceeded from the harlot, contrasting it with the treachery of Judas and his betrayal of Christ. Both of these acts fell on Wednesday, corresponding to the twenty-first of March, two days before the Mosaic Passover, as it appears from the course of the account of Saint Matthew the Evangelist.

The above mentioned harlot anointed the head and feet of Jesus with spikenard, and wiped them with the hair of her head. The precious ointment was worth three hundred dinars, or about fifteen pieces of Venetian gold. When the disciples saw this they stumbled, especially Judas, the money-lover, and were angry because of the wasting of such an amount of ointment. Jesus rebuked them, lest the woman be embarrassed. Judas was wroth, and went to the high priests, where they were gathered in the house of Caiaphas, taking counsel against Jesus, and agreed with them to deliver the Master for thirty pieces of silver. From that time Judas sought an opportunity to deliver Him. (*Matthew 26:2-16*) Because of this, the fast of Wednesday was instituted from the days of the apostolic age itself.

Wherefore, O Christ God, anointed with the supersensuous ointment, deliver us from suffering, and have mercy upon us. Amen.

Exaposteilarion

I behold Thy bridal chamber richly adorned, O my Saviour; but I have no wedding garment to worthily enter. Make radiant the garment of my soul, O Giver of Light, and save me.

It is edifying on this day to read the following Scripture passages, as provided in the Holy Week Service Book:

In the morning (Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts of Tuesday):

Exodus 2:11-22

Job 2:1-10

Matthew 26:6-16

Psalm 50

In the evening (Holy Unction Service):

James 5:10-16 & Luke 10:25-37
Romans 15:1-7 & Luke 19:1-10
1 Corinthians 12:27-13:8a & Matthew 10:1, 5-8
2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 & Matthew 8:14-23
2 Corinthians 1:8-11 & Matthew 25:1-13
Galatians 5:22-6:2 & Matthew 15:21-28
1 Thessalonians 5:14-23 & Matthew 9:9-13
Psalm 50



WISDOM OF THE HOLY FATHERS

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Archbishop of Constantinople

†407

~ from his Instructions to the Catechumens ~

THE ISRAELITES WITNESSED MARVELS; you also will witness marvels, greater and more splendid than those which accompanied them on their departure from Egypt. You did not see Pharaoh drowned with his armies, but you have seen the devil with his weapons overcome by the waters of baptism. The Israelites passed through the sea; you have passed from death to life. They were delivered from the Egyptians; you have been delivered from the powers of darkness. The Israelites were freed from slavery to a pagan people; you have been freed from the much greater slavery to sin.

Do you need another argument to show that the gifts you have received are greater than theirs? The Israelites could not look on the face of Moses in glory, though he was their fellow servant and kinsman. But you have seen the face of Christ in His glory. Paul cried out: *We see the glory of the Lord with faces unveiled.* (2 Corinthians 3:18)

In those days Christ was present to the Israelites as He followed them, but He is present to us in a much deeper sense. The Lord was with them because of the favor He showed to Moses; now He is with us not simply because of your obedience. After Egypt they dwelt in desert places; after your departure you will dwell in heaven. Their great leader and commander was Moses; we have a new Moses, God Himself, as our Leader and Commander.

What distinguished the first Moses? *Moses*, Scripture tells us, *was more gentle than all who dwelt upon the earth.* (Numbers 12:3) We can rightly say the same of the new Moses, for there was with Him the very Spirit of gentleness, united to Him in His inmost being. In those days, Moses raised his hands to heaven and brought down manna, the bread of Angels; the new Moses raises His hands to heaven and gives us the food of eternal life. Moses struck the rock and brought forth streams of water; Christ touches His table, strikes the spiritual rock of the New Covenant and draws forth the living water of the Spirit. This rock is like a fountain in the midst of Christ's table so that on all sides the flocks may draw near to this living spring and refresh themselves in the waters of salvation.

Since this fountain, this source of life, this table surrounds us with untold blessings and fills us with the gifts of the Spirit, let us approach it with sincerity of heart and purity of conscience to receive grace and mercy in our time of need. Grace and mercy be yours from the only-begotten Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; through Him and with Him be glory, honor and power to the Father and the life-giving Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages.

Amen.



CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Archbishop

†444

~ from his commentary on the Gospel of John ~

ALL WHO RECEIVE the sacred flesh of Christ are united with Him as members of His body. This is the teaching of Saint Paul when he speaks of the mystery of our religion *which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His Saints. (Colossians 1:26)* If, in Christ, all of us, both ourselves and He Who is within us by His own flesh, are members of the same body, is it not clear that we are one, both with one another and with Christ? He is the bond that unites us, because He is at once both God and man.

With regard to our unity in the Spirit, we may say, following the same line of thought, that all of us who have received one and the same Spirit, the Holy Spirit, are united intimately, both with one another and with God. Taken separately, we are many, and Christ sends the Spirit, Who is both the Father's Spirit and His own, to dwell in each of us. Yet that Spirit, being one and indivisible, gathers together those who are distinct from each other as individuals, and causes them all to be seen as a unity in Himself. Just as Christ's sacred flesh has power to make those in whom it is present into one body, so the one, indivisible Spirit of God, dwelling in all, causes all to become one in spirit.

Therefore, Saint Paul appeals to us to *bear one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, Who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:2-6)* If the one Spirit dwells in us, the one God and Father of all will be in us, and He, through His Son, will gather together into unity with one another and with Himself all who share in the Spirit.

There is also another way of showing that we are made one by sharing in the Holy Spirit. If we have given up our worldly way of life and submitted once for all to the laws of the Spirit, it must surely be obvious to everyone that by repudiating, in a sense, our own life, and taking on the supernatural likeness of the Holy Spirit, Who is united to us, our nature is transformed so that we are no longer merely men, but also sons of God, spiritual men, by reason of the share we have received in the divine Nature. We are all one, therefore, in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We are one in mind and holiness, we are one through our communion in the sacred flesh of Christ, and through our sharing in the one Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

