

# HOLY PASCHA WEEK BOOKLET

St. Mary & St. Athanasius Coptic  
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LAZARUS SATURDAY – HOLY  
WEDNESDAY

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## HOW TO BENEFIT SPIRITUALLY FROM HOLY WEEK

*Letter Written By The Thrice-Blessed Pope Shenouda III*

### **1. Our Behavior Inside and Outside of Church**

It is very noticeable that many people during Pascha Week are one thing inside Church and completely different outside. Inside Church, we observe black curtains, somber hymns, solemn readings, and concentration on the suffering of Christ. Outside of Church, we often laugh, joke around, socialize, and think and talk about many worldly issues. We lose all the spiritual depth that we gained inside Church. Let

us concentrate our thoughts, conversations, and meditations around the events of this holy week and the Passion of our Savior.

## **2. Retreat**

During our regular fasting days, we put the words of the bible before us, “Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly” (Joel 1:14). How much more then should we apply this commandment during Holy Week? This week should be characterized by solitude and retreat with God, by staying away from idle discussions and various means of entertainment of pleasure. Reserve your time to God and to spiritual activities worthy of this week. In the first hour of the Monday of the Holy Pascha, we read St. Shenouda’s homily, which warns us: “Brethren if we want to escape God’s punishment and find mercy in His eyes, let us sit every evening alone by ourselves and search our souls...”

## **3. Follow the Steps of Christ**

Meditate on the events of the week one by one: from Palm Sunday, when Christ refused His worldly kingdom and the Jews gave up their hope in Him, until they crucified and buried Him. On Palm Sunday, ask yourself, Is Christ King and Lord over everything in my life? Do I, like Christ, turn down worldly glory for spiritual and eternal glory? During the General Funeral Service, do I consider myself attending my own funeral? And when the Church denounces Judas’ traitorous kiss on the eve of the Wednesday of Pascha Week, ask yourself in prayer, “How often, O Lord have I betrayed You? How many times have I told You words of love in prayers, while my actions show the opposite and my heart is far away from You?”

## **4. The Fellowship of His Sufferings**

Saint Paul said, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Philip. 3:10). Can we give ourselves an exercise this week to share in the fellowship of His suffering and be conformed to His death? Can we follow Him in His suffering and ascend with Him to the Cross? Can we say with St. Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20)? Therefore, in order for Christ to live in us, we have to carry our cross and follow Him. If

you have a cross in your life, do not complaint about it. Instead, rejoice in it and bear it for Christ's sake. "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but to suffer for His sake" (Philip. 1:29).

### **5. Asceticism**

Whoever puts the suffering of Christ before him will not take any pleasure in eating and drinking or pampering the body. But in order to succeed in pursuing asceticism, we must satisfy our souls with spiritual food so that it may thrive and overcome physical hunger. It was customary for the Church to fast until at least the 9th hour on normal fasting days and until sunset during the Holy Week of Pascha. St. Athanasius even declared that this period of Holy Week should be received with "longer prayers, fasts, and vigils so that we may be able to anoint our lintels with precious blood and escape the destroyer." And again, the blessed saint says, "Let us thus engage in the holy fasts, as having been prescribed by Him, and by means of which we find the way to God."

### **6. Spiritual Readings**

Spiritual readings are also food for the soul. The Church has organized for us a treasure of appropriate readings for every day of the Holy Week, comprised of Gospel readings, Old Testament prophecies that correspond to the events of each day, spiritual explanations and sermons of the Church Fathers. On Bright Saturday (Apocalypse night) the Church reads the entire Book of Revelation.

### **7. Hymns**

The hymns of the Pascha Week are moving and full of spiritual depth. Hymns, like reading, preserve the thought from wandering and guide it in spiritual direction. We should continue to recite the hymns while walking, meditating, and resting.

### **8. Prayer**

Since the prayers of the Agpeya are not used during Holy Week, we are to substitute personal prayers in their place, in addition to the intensive prayers of the Church, asking the Lord who bore the sins of the world and died for us, to forgive and have mercy upon us according to His great mercy.

### **9. Confession and Communion**

During this week, each person must sit with himself and remember his sins and put them on Christ's shoulders and tell Him in shame, "Carry O Lord my sins too, with the sins of the rest of humanity. Take my sins and nail them to the Cross with You, so that Your Blood may wipe them away!" Look carefully at your sins and know that they are the cause of His crucifixion. Many people cry out of their sorrow for Christ's suffering while they crucify Him every day with their sins. We should not feel sorry for Christ during this week, but should be sorry for our sins that caused Him these pains. As Jesus told the women that were crying over Him, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children" (Lk. 23:28). Before the Cross, we all stand as sinners, all under the condemnation. "There was not even one doing good, no, not one" (Psa. 14:3). We confess our sins and prepare ourselves for communion. There are three liturgies during Holy Week: on Passover Thursday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday (preceded, of course, by the Liturgy of Palm Sunday).

### **10. Spiritual Storage**

Pascha Week is not an opportunity to benefit for one week only, but a time to store up enough spiritual nourishment to last the whole year; particularly needed during the 50 days after the Resurrection when there is no fasting.

## **LAZARUS SATURDAY**

The Church in Jerusalem designated the Saturday before Palm Sunday as the commemoration of Lazarus, a tradition dating back to the end of the fourth century. On this Saturday, the Early Church began to celebrate Holy Week in Jerusalem. The day started with a service in the sanctuary called the *Lazarium*, which was held at Bethany. The Orthodox Church has preserved Lazarus Saturday as an essential link between the Great Lent and Holy Week. It is the day we celebrate our death and resurrection in the Resurrection and the Life.

During this time, the catechumens seeking to be baptized before Easter were taught the Creed. Appropriately, the final sentence of the Creed would be the theme of this day. The goal of the entire Holy Week, and

Christianity itself, is to "look for the Resurrection of the Dead and the Life of the Coming Age." This day is closely united with Palm Sunday, and it is in Bethany that Lazarus was raised, and Christ had also left for His departure into Jerusalem. Thus, it serves as the link between Lazarus's life, death, and resurrection and that of our Lord.

The hymns chanted during the Divine Liturgy are in the annual tune, noting a significant shift from the hymns of the Great Fast. This annual tune prepares the congregation for the sorrowful hymns of Lent and the festal hymns they will hear the following day for Palm Sunday. The same notion is later used in Bright Saturday to shift the hymns from mourning for Great Friday to the joyous Feast of the Resurrection.

During the evening service, special hymns and prayers are chanted. The Midnight Psalmody begins with a long hymn, and the whole service is centered around the theme of resurrection and life. It is a time for reflection and contemplation as we prepare ourselves for the joyous celebration of Easter.

### **Reflection Points:**

- *In what areas of my life do I feel called to experience resurrection or renewal?*
- *How can I spiritually prepare myself to enter into the journey of Holy Week with greater awareness and intention?*

## **PALM SUNDAY**

Happy Feast of Palm Sunday! During the Palm Sunday liturgy, the Church commemorates the entry of our Lord into Jerusalem. We read the Gospel according to St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John. On Palm Sunday, as Jesus was heading to Jerusalem from Bethany, the place where He raised Lazarus from the dead, He asked his disciples to go into a village to get a colt for Him to ride ([Mark 11:2](#)). By riding on a colt, Jesus fulfilled the following prophecy from Zechariah: "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" ([John 12:15, Zechariah 9:9](#)) As He was entering Jerusalem, the

people laid clothes and palms on the road ([Matthew 21:8](#)) and were chanting “‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!’” ([Matthew 21:9](#))

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

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

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

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

### **Reflection Points:**

- *Are there areas where I’m being called to choose humility or self-denial over recognition or praise?*

- *What thoughts or emotions come to mind when I picture Jesus entering Jerusalem on a colt? How did Christ feel in this moment, knowing His Crucifixion was coming?*

## THE EVE OF HOLY MONDAY

### Introduction

In general, Monday Eve focuses on how we should be preparing ourselves to share in Christ's sufferings in this Passion week. In each of the four Gospels, we read about Christ predicting His Crucifixion and Resurrection. In the Gospels, Christ prepares His disciples for what is to come. The prophecies in each of the hours also prophesied what is to come. The prophecy of the 1st Hour from Zephaniah 1:2-12 warns of God's Judgement coming and the destruction of everything on the face of the Earth. In the 3rd Hour prophecy, Zephaniah 1:14-2:3, and the 6th Hour prophecy, Joel 1:5-15, we are called to repentance to be redeemed. In the 9th Hour prophecy, Micah 2:3-11, and the 11th Hour prophecy, Micah 3:1-4, a warning to false prophets and leaders who persecuted the people of the Lord. When the leaders cry for Him, "He will hide His Face from them because of the evil they have done." Throughout this Eve of Monday, there is a central theme of being prepared for the sufferings to come.

### Being Prepared

#### **1st Hour:**

This evening is the first night of our Journey with Christ in this week of Passion. Therefore, we must be prepared to partake in this journey. The prophecy of the 1st Hour explains to us that "the Lord has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests" (Zephaniah 1:7); therefore, we must be prepared for this banquet. How are we to be prepared for this banquet? We must not be lukewarm and complacent in our lives. Zephaniah 1:4-12 states, "I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal, . . . who fill their master's house with violence and frauds . . . and I will punish the men who are complacent". If we are lukewarm, our Lord will

spit us out and not accept us into His banquet. Psalm 28:6-7 continues on this theme in showing us that we need to cry out for God's help.

“Blessed be the Lord! For He has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy. The Lord is my strength and my shield; in Him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to Him.” (Psalm 28:6-7). In the Gospel of the 1st Hour, Jesus predicts His death. During this Gospel, Christ says to the people listening, “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.”

(John 12:25-26). What does it mean to hate our life? We are not hating being alive—this is a gift given to us by God. We hate the splendors of the world and the idols that we have in it. For when we realize and see the beauty of what is ahead of us, we will not love the world. In other words, we will hate our worldly life.

### **3rd and 6th Hour:**

The 3rd and 6th Hours continue on the same theme of being prepared for the Passion of Christ but also begin to talk about being prepared for the end of days. The prophecy of the 3rd Hour, Zephaniah 1:14-2:3, prophesied about the end of days and what it will look like. Zephaniah 1:15-16 states, “A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements.” Then in Zephaniah 1:18 states, “Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the Lord”. Are we prepared for the coming of the Lord? Nothing in this world will save us, but only our relationship with God. Zephaniah 2:1-2 calls for repentance, “Gather together, yes, gather, O shameless nation, before the decree takes effect—before the day passes away like chaff—before there comes upon you the burning anger of the Lord, before there comes upon you the day of the anger of the Lord.”

Have we repented? Have we gone to confession? Have we been fighting the good fight? How is our relationship with God? Are we truly prepared, or are we lukewarm? Do we come to church and act like we are good Christians and then, once we leave church and return to our worldly life, act the complete opposite? We must not be lukewarm, for God will spit us out, and His wrath will be upon us.

The prophecy of the 6th Hour, Joel 1:5-15, is another calling to all those who have wandered off the correct path and have lost everything. Joel 1:11-13 states, “Be ashamed, O tillers of the soil; wail, O vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field has perished. The vine dries up; the fig tree languishes. Pomegranate, palm, and apple, all the trees of the field are dried up, and gladness dries up from the children of man. Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests, wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God!” Here, Joel summons the people to beg, wail, and have the ministers of the altar lament under the conditions of famine. Joel again is calling for repentance. When we sin, we must come humbly and sorrowful for what we have done to truly repent of the sin that we have committed.

In the 3rd Hour Gospel, Luke 9:18-22, Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah, and Jesus predicts His death to the disciples. Along with this, in the 6th Hour Gospel, Mark 10:32-34, Jesus predicts His death and resurrection for a third time. Why in each of the Gospels today are we reading about Christ predicting His death to His disciples? St. John Chrysostom states, “He was preparing the minds of His disciples for what would happen to Him on the Cross —His death in the flesh. He assured them that He is going to rise again, wiping out all His sufferings, and disgrace, through the power of a miraculous resurrection.” Just as Christ was preparing His disciples for what was to come, we are also preparing ourselves to pick up our cross and endure in Christ’s passion with Him.

## **9th and 11th Hour:**

The 9th and 11th Hours transition to speaking about preparing for the suffering of our Lord and His last days. The prophecy of the 9th Hour, Micah 2:3-11, speaks about the suffering of Christ that is to come. Micah 2:8-9 states, “But lately my people have risen up as an enemy; you strip the rich robe from those who pass by trustingly with no thought of war. The women of my people you drive out from their delightful houses; from their young children you take away my splendor forever.” A lot is going on in these two verses. We read that “My people”, the Jews, have turned against the Lord, and anyone who believes in Him will be stripped of Him by those who do not believe. Next, what does “the women of my people you drive out from their delightful houses” mean?

This is foreshadowing how people and the worldly objects that we love will drive us away from dwelling in the Lord, the pleasant homes. Every day we are being challenged by people and desires to partake in the path of the unjust and ungodly, and every day they “strip the rich robe... and the women of my people you drive out from their delightful house”. The Psalm in the 9th Hour, Psalm 17:6,1, directly relates to the prophecy. “I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me; hear my words.” We are calling on our God to hear our prayers to deliver us from our sufferings and the lust of the flesh. When we hear these Psalms being hymned, we are praying with emotion and passion for God to hear us.

The Gospel of 9th Hour, Mark 8:27-33, we read again of the Lord preparing the disciples for His suffering. Mark 8:31-33 states, “the Son of Man must suffer many things...and Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when Jesus turned and looked at His disciples, But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind me, Satan!’ He said, ‘For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.’” For Christ to absolve the sins of the whole world so that we may be in communion with the Father, the Son of Man, Christ had to die and be the ultimate sacrifice. The Father chose the Son, who is above all, to offer Himself for everyone. St. Ambrose of Milan states, “He is stronger than death and capable of saving others;

He rose from the dead without help, conquered death without support from man or any other creature; He rose to abolish slavery to lusts, as He did not acknowledge the chains of death.” What does this mean for us? This mean that only through Christ, who conquered sin through His death, are we able to conquer sin and those who “strip the rich robe from those who pass by trustingly with no thought of war. The women of my people you drive out from their delightful houses” (Micah 2:8-9).

In the Gospel of the 11th Hour, Mark 8:19-23, we read about Christ telling the disciples to have faith. “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you” (Mark 8:20). Christ is telling us how little faith that we have and if we were to have the faith like a grain of mustard seed, we can remarkable things through Him. But here Christ is not necessarily telling us that this is what we should have faith for, but He is telling us to have faith in Him no matter what because of the challenges and suffering that His people will face. Mark 8:22 says, “The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.” Here Christ is not only telling the disciples that He will be betrayed, but He is also foreshadowing that His own people will continue betraying Him. Every day we continue to choose to fall into sin, and we choose to betray Him who died for our sins. We must ask ourselves, why do we continue to betray our Savior? What sin is worth committing to betray He who loves us more than we can imagine? To prepare for His suffering, may we all give up this sin and allow us to have the faith of a mustard seed so we can conquer this sin that leads us to betray Him.

### **Reflection Points:**

- *Christ says, “Whoever loves his life loses it...” What worldly attachments or idols do I struggle to let go of?*
- *Psalm 17: “I cried out, because You listened to me, O God.” Do I bring my struggles to God in prayer with trust? Or do I try to handle them on my own?*

# HOLY MONDAY

## Major Themes

### *The Beginning*

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

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

### *The Fall*

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

### *The Consequences of the Fall*

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

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

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

### ***Solution***

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

The Lord is not comfortable with humanity being comfortable in sin. In the prophecy of Isaiah in the 9th hour, it is written “Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain” ([Isaiah 40:4](#)). The Lord came to the earth to return man to his original purpose. Why? How? He continues “And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together...” ([Isaiah 40:5](#)). This signals the coming of the Lord, and it is visible in the Gospel of St. John, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” ([John 1:14](#)). Salvation was seen by mankind; it was the glory of God in the Son Jesus Christ.

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

“I AM” is the name of God, and it is an unutterable name. From the Pharisees' perspective, Christ is blaspheming and making Himself equal

with God. They are blinded by the pride of their hearts. The solution to the problem of the human race is in the Lord, fully God, fully man, who is able to save mankind. The rejection of Christ by the Pharisees sets up and puts in motion most of the events going forward through the week, until the crucifixion.

### ***Outward vs. Inward***

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

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

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

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

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

### ***The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.***

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

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

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

### **Reflection Points:**

- *Do you experience your relationship with God as loving and harmonious, or strained and distant? Why?*
- *How do you understand “the fear of the Lord”? How does it guide your decisions and your relationship with Him?*

# EVE OF HOLY TUESDAY

## Introduction

The Gospels of the Blessed Eve of Tuesday are taken from many points in Christ's ministry. In the First Hour, Christ instructs us to enter through the narrow gate. The Third Hour, Christ mourns Jerusalem as they have killed many prophets and righteous men that God has sent to them throughout their years in the Holy Land. In the Sixth Hour and Eleventh Hours, Jesus warns us to watch and be ready for our day of departure. Finally, in the Ninth Hour, Christ mourns the Pharisees and lawyers for their wrongdoings and their evil.

The readings of the Blessed Eve of Tuesday are important as they provide us with some important steps to achieving salvation.

## Major Themes

### *Repent and Turn to Him*

In the Gospel of the First Hour, Christ has instructed us to strive to enter through the narrow gate in order to partake in the blessings of heaven: "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." (Luke 13:24).

Before even attempting to strive to enter the narrow gates, one must first have a repentant heart. In the readings of the First Hour, the readings emphasize the importance of repentance. In the prophecy, Zechariah writes, "Therefore say to them, Thus declare the Lord of hosts: Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 1:3).

Additionally, the concluding sentence of the exposition of the First Hour is "repent and make amends, that your sins may be taken away." The Church is emphasizing the ever-important role repentance has in our journey to salvation. Through repentance, our sins are washed away. Christ is waiting for us to make this first step, as is particularly evident in the Third Hour readings. In Malachi 1:2, Malachi writes, "I have loved

you,” says the Lord. But you say, “How have you loved us?”” (Malachi 1:2), and in the Gospel, while mourning for Jerusalem, the one who kills prophets, he says, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34).

St. Augustine writes about the hen that Christ mentions in Luke 13:34: “That Hen is the Divine Wisdom; but I assumed flesh to accommodate itself to its chickens. See the hen with feathers bristling, with wings hanging down, with voice broken, and tremulous, and faint, and languid, accommodating herself to her little ones. Our egg then, that is, our hope, let us place beneath the wings of this hen” (*Harmony of the Gospels*).

Christ wants us to be under His protection and to obtain the blessings of His wisdom. He is waiting for us to turn to Him—to walk along the narrow path.

### ***Do Not Focus on the Earthly***

Many of the Gospels of the Holy Eve of Tuesday warn us to not focus on the worldly. As discussed earlier, the First Hour Gospel is about striving to enter through the narrow gate. If the narrow gate leads to Him, then the broad path must be the worldly things under Satan’s domain. As St. Augustine says in his 99th Homily in the *Commentary on Luke*, “[The broad path] means an unrestrained tendency to carnal lust; a base and pleasure-loving life; luxurious feasts, parties and banquets; and unrestrained inclinations to everything which is condemned by the law and displeasing to God [...] Those who enter by the narrow gate must withdraw from all these things in order to be with Christ and feast with Him.”

This emphasis on not focusing on the worldly is not only found in Luke 13:23-30 but also throughout the readings of the Sixth Hour. In the Gospel of the Sixth Hour, we first read “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap” (Luke 21:34).

The exposition clarifies why it is important to not to be engulfed with the pleasures of the world: “engrossment in worldly concerns could bring on us vicious passions, cause us to stray away from the fear God, the wicked can overwhelm us, drive us away from the path of salvation, diminish the awareness of our soul’s salvation, and subject us to the dominion of death just as the prey falls in the trap.”

The combination of these readings warns us that being engulfed in the pleasures of this world and carnal lusts is simply detrimental to our salvation.

### ***Keep Inwardly Pure***

While it is important to not pursue carnal lusts, it is also important to pursue purity inwardly as well. The readings of the Ninth Hour all affirm that message.

In the prophecy according to Hosea, we read “Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you” (Hosea 10:12). In the Gospel of this hour, Christ calls out the Pharisees as they “cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you [the Pharisees] are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also?” (Luke 11:39-40). That message emphasizing the importance of keeping the inward pure is also affirmed by the beginning of the Ninth Hour exposition: “Listen to the merciful, compassionate, the patient who has great mercy when He catechizes us to be clean not only in our bodies but also in our hearts.” While it is important to not pursue carnal lusts (therefore keep our bodies pure), being outwardly clean without the right mentality or heart causes us harm.

Thankfully, there are many ways to re-sensitize our hearts. St. Ambrose writes in the *Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*: “Do you see how many remedies there are? Compassion cleanses us. The Word of God cleanses us, according to what is written, ‘You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you’ (Jn. 15:3). Not only in this passage but also in others, you have revealed how great grace is. ‘Alms delivers

from death' (Tobit 12:9). 'Store up alms in the heart of the poor, and it shall obtain help for you on the evil day' (Sirach 29:12)" (St. Ambrose, *Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*). Additionally, Christ instructed the Pharisees to "give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you" (Luke 11:41).

A cup that is clean on the outside but is dirty on the inside is still unclean. It is then important to focus not only on avoiding carnal lusts but also on inward purification.

### ***Keep Watch***

Finally, as Christians, once we are cleansed, we must continue to maintain this cleansed state. In the final Gospel of this service, Christ specifically warns us about the end times.

He specifically emphasizes remaining on guard three times. Firstly, in verse 33, He says "Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come" (Mark 13:33). After providing an analogy, He then says, "Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning" (Mark 13:35). In case He has not made it clear, He says "And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake" (Mark 13:37). Over four verses, Christ instructs us to be on guard three different times. It is important to remain watchful as it can prevent us from falling into sin.

The readings of the Holy Tuesday Eve take the congregant on a journey to salvation. First, one must acknowledge that he or she is in sin by being repentant and remember that Christ is always ready to accept that repentance. However, repentance without diligent effort to avoid the sin is useless. Therefore, that person must work to cleanse themselves, outwardly and inwardly. Finally, as they are being cleansed, they must be careful not to fall back to his or her original state.

Throughout our lives, may God continue to help us maintain a repentant heart, be watchful, and be careful not to engulf ourselves with the cares of this world.

## Reflection Points:

- *How do you personally experience God's love when you stray or fall into sin?*
- *When have you felt "trapped" by worldly concerns? How did that impact your relationship with God?*

# HOLY TUESDAY

## Introduction to Holy Tuesday

Throughout the day of Holy Tuesday, several themes are discussed in the readings. The first hour focuses on God's love for us and how we should respond to it with a soft heart. The third hour offers hope for those going through difficult times by reminding us that trials and tribulations will bring us closer to God and strengthen our faith in Him. The sixth hour warns us of the dangers of having a stubborn heart and turning away from the Lord. Finally, the ninth hour emphasizes the importance of preparing ourselves for the Lord's second coming through repentance and the help of the sacraments offered by the Church.

## Major Themes

### **1. Obeying God's Word**

A significant theme of the first hour of Holy Tuesday is obeying God's word. Instead of having a hard heart, as many of the Jews did during Jesus' time, we should have a soft heart that is always eager to listen to Him.

In the first hour, we read from Exodus 19, which is when Moses meets God on Mount Sinai. God tells Moses, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. " (Exodus 19:4-5). God draws the Israelites out

from the land of sin (Egypt) to Himself and instructs His people to obey His voice.

After Exodus, we read from Job 23:2-24:25, where we can see how, despite Job's anguish and confusion and suffering, he maintains his belief in God's justice, righteousness, and love. He wrestles with doubt and despair, yet his faith remains steadfast, even as he grapples with the apparent silence of God in the face of his suffering. In his prayer, "I will not disregard His commandments; but I have hidden His words in my bosom" (Job 23:12). Job held fast to the Lord's commandments, depended on Him, and did not disobey Him because he had experienced God's love and trusted in His will.

The last prophecy of the hour is from Hosea, where we see the consequences of the Israelites rejecting God's word. "My people are like as those who have no knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being a priest for Me; and because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children." (Hosea 4:1-8).

In Psalm 119:2, 6 and John 8:21-29 we can see a contrast between the enemy's "lying lips and deceitful tongue" (Psalm 119:2) and God's spoken word, "but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things" (John 8:28). Christ also warns us that the natural consequences of not loving God and ignoring His word is that dying in your sins (John 8:24).

## **2. Tribulation for the Righteous**

The third hour readings reveal to us that both the righteous and the wicked will suffer. However, the righteous will suffer temporarily on earth, while the wicked will suffer eternally. The readings from this hour give us hope for when we undergo trials and tribulations. They remind us that even if we are righteous and do God's will, we will still face struggles and hardships. However, these trials and tribulations will bring us closer to God and strengthen our faith in Him. St John Chrysostom reinforces this idea when he says, "Whether God brings upon us a famine, or a war, or any calamity whatsoever, He does so out of His exceeding great care and kindness."

This theme of purification during times of tribulation is illustrated in all three readings from this hour. In Deuteronomy 8:18, we read, "Then you shall remember the Lord your God, for He it is who gives you strength, that you may gain power, that He may establish His covenant the Lord swore to your fathers, as it is today." While in Sirach 2:4-6 we read, "Accept whatever is brought upon you, and exchange for your humiliation be patient. Because gold is tested in fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of abasement. Believe in Him that will help you; make your ways straight, and hope in Him." It is clear that the Church tells us that God is the source of strength in times when we may be tested by fire. The last prophecy from this hour is from 1 Kings 19:9-14, where Elijah's zealotry is apparent despite his own people's (the Israelites') plan to take his life. In this prophecy, Elijah serves as a type of Christ, who was delivered to the cross by the very people He came to save. The Psalm and Gospel readings also discuss suffering and our response to it. In Psalm 119, David pleads with God for redemption and deliverance from his suffering. His plea acknowledges that God is the source of all hope and salvation. Meanwhile, in the Gospel reading from Matthew 23:37-24:2, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem for not returning to Him despite the wonders, the words, and the light that He brought to her. Origen says about Jerusalem, "Actually, we are the Jerusalem that Jesus wept over. After we came to know the mysteries of the Truth, the words of the Gospel, and the teachings of the Church; and after we have seen the mysteries of the Lord, we still commit sins!"

### **3. Judgement for the Wicked**

In the 6th Hour, we are warned of the dangers of having a hard and stubborn heart. The warning is strict and even frightening as seen in the words of the prophet Ezekiel, "I am against you, and I will draw My sword out of its sheath and cut off the...wicked from you." (Ezekiel 21:3). Nevertheless, this sword according to Fr Tadros Yacoub Malaty is only dangerous for those who despise it. It is important to note that while it is a sharpened sword that will be drawn against all people, it will only slay the wicked; but, for the children of God, it is a chastising rod that looks to correct their sinful ways. The prophecy from Sirach instructs to not be ashamed of confession and warns us not to rely on

our strength. We can reflect on the recurring phrase “Do not” in this prophecy as representing the earlier-mentioned rod of correction. In the last prophecy, however, we see the consequences of despising the sword when we read from Isaiah 1:5-6: “The whole head is in pain, and the whole heart in sadness. From the feet all the way to the head, there is no soundness in them, only wounds and bruises and festering sores; They have not been closed or bandaged or soothed with ointment.”

The theme of Judgement is also continued in the Gospel of this hour from John 8. Jesus tells the Pharisees that His judgment is true because it is not He alone who judges, but His Father also. In addition, Christ says that He is the light of the world. When we stand before God in our darkness, our sins become illuminated because of His holiness and purity; and while we may feel unworthy, God supports us, delivers us from our sin, and exalts us. This mirrors the concept of the chastening rod discussed earlier, where correction and the holiness of God lead naturally to an inclination to praise and thank Him on account of His mercy and judgment. This reflection connects with the Psalm of this hour, where David praises God for delivering him from his enemies and exalting him over his adversaries.

#### **4. Salvation Through the Sacraments**

Another theme from this Holy Tuesday is the second coming of the Lord and the importance of preparing ourselves for it through repentance and the sacraments offered by the church. In the 9th hour, we read from Genesis, and we come across how God saved Noah from the flood by instructing him to build an ark; and how, in response to God’s salvific work, Noah offers a burnt offering. These events serve as symbols for the sacraments of baptism, the church, and the Eucharist, respectively. Through baptism, symbolized by the flood, we are cleansed from our sins. Through the church, symbolized by the Ark, we are saved. St Cyprian says about the ark and the Church, “Those who were within were saved; those outside will perish.” Lastly, through the partaking of the eucharist, symbolized by the burnt offering, we become united with God through grace.

Proverbs 9:1-11 also speaks of the church and the sacraments, using the metaphor of wisdom building her house, hewing out her seven pillars, slaughtering her meat, mixing her wine, and furnishing her table. This reminds us of the abundant blessings that await those who partake in the sacraments and follow the teachings of the church. St Hippolytus explains that the seven pillars are the “fragrant grace of the All-Holy Spirit, as Isaiah says: ‘And the seven spirits of God shall rest upon Him.’”

The readings from the prophets Isaiah and Daniel focus on the second coming of the Lord, as He will come to judge the entire world. From Isaiah 40:10 we read, “Behold, His reward is with Him”; to which Justin Martyr interprets, “It is then that He will give the laborers their reward and ‘He will reward each according to His works’ (Matt. 16:27).” Similarly, we read from Daniel 7:10 “A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him...and the books were opened.” Jerome explains that “the closed books will show an accountability of all our performances, every word or thought or even any idle word (Matt. 12:36).” Thus, we are reminded of the importance of leading a righteous life and seeking forgiveness for our sins so that we may be found blameless on judgement day.

Finally, the Gospel (Matthew 24:3-35) speaks of the abomination of desolation, referring to the second coming of the Lord, which will be awesome and full of glory. The Gospel encourages us to be prepared by living a sacramental life of faith and repentance, always remaining vigilant for the coming of the Lord.

## **5. The Throne of God**

The theme for this hour is the throne of God, in which He will come to judge the entire world. In the prophecy from Isaiah, we read, “The teaching of His lips are with glory, a revelation full of wrath, and the wrath of His anger shall devour like fire”. While for the wicked His words may seem like fire, for us who delight in the Lord, we can exclaim with David the prophet, “How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!” It is wonderful to contemplate on

the Second coming and how elated we will be to hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your lord” (Matthew 25:23). The reading from Proverbs 6:24-7:5 tells us how to hear those sweet words in the second coming of the Lord when it says, “Guard my commandments and you will live, and my words as the pupils of your eyes; and put them around your fingers, and write them upon the breadth of your heart” (Proverbs 7:3-4).

During this hour, we chant from Psalm 44:6, 40:1, also known as the hymn ΠΕΚΕΘΡΟΝΟΣ (Pekethronos/Your Throne). The Church, in its wisdom, has chosen a melismatic (long) tune for this hymn, inviting us to reflect on God's throne symbolized by the cross, and to always remember His second coming. The Psalm says, “Your Throne, O God, is forever and ever; the scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. Blessed is the man who considers the poor and the needy; the Lord will deliver Him in the day of trouble.” What can the throne of God represent other than the Cross?! Psalm 96 makes it clear that the throne of God is indeed the Cross; we read, “For the Lord reigned on a wood.” The wood (the cross) signifies His authority, reigning over our souls. Furthermore, unlike the authority and reign of kings, which relies on instilling fear in those they are governing, God reigns over us through love, not fear. God governs us with His mercy and compassion, which were made manifest through the cross. Therefore, unlike the throne of a king, the throne of God emanates love.

The Gospel from Matthew 25:14-26:2 focuses on the parable of the talents and concludes with Christ prophesying that He will be delivered up to be crucified. Origen says about the parable of the talents, “In this parable, the nobleman going into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return, is none other than Christ going into another country to receive the kingdoms of this world and the things in it; those who receive the ten talents are those who have been entrusted with the dispensation of the Logos which has been committed unto them.” Thus, the theme of judgment is continued in this hour, urging us to utilize everything God has graced us with.

Let us conclude with the words of St. Ambrose of Milan, “Therefore, let us not keep the Lord’s money buried and hidden in the flesh; nor let us hide our one in a napkin; but like good money-changers let us ever weigh it out with labor of mind and body, with an even and ready will, that the word may be near, even in your mouth and in your heart. This is the word of the Lord, this is the precious talent, by which you are redeemed.”

### **Reflection Points:**

- *Can I recall a time when a painful experience deepened my faith or reliance on God?*
- *Am I using the talents God has given me for His glory, or have I “buried” any of them out of fear or complacency?*

## EVE OF HOLY WEDNESDAY

### **Introduction**

With the exception of the 11th Hour, the rest of the hours point to Christ’s Second Coming. In the 1st and 6th Hours, Jesus utilizes Parables to describe how the Kingdom of Heaven is like a wedding banquet and how He is the bridegroom. Additionally, in the 3rd Hour Gospel, we read that “concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” ([Matthew 24:36](#)). Throughout each of these parables and readings, there are a couple of recurring themes:

### **Major Themes**

#### ***A New Chosen People***

In each of these Parables, there is a group that receives a reward, and there is a group that misses out on the reward. In the First Hour Gospel, the reward is the ability to enter the Wedding—symbolic of entering the kingdom of Heaven. Those who receive the reward are those who accepted the wedding invitation—those who were on the streets, the esteemed and not-as-esteemed ([Matthew 22:10](#)). The people who are punished were the original invitees and the person who was not dressed appropriately. In the Third Hour Gospel, the watchful and diligent

servant will be made ruler of all the master's possessions ([v. 46](#)) while the lazy servant is sent out to a place where "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" ([v. 51](#)). In the Sixth Hour Gospel, the virgins who had oil for their lamps went with the Bridegroom while those who did not have oil for their lamps missed their chance to be with Him.

It is interesting that in the Ninth Hour Gospel, Christ rebukes the Israelites, those whom God originally designated to be His chosen people. This is further emphasized in the prophecy of the Ninth Hour, when Hosea states that "Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars. Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. The Lord will break down their altars and destroy their pillars" ([Hosea 10:1-2](#)).

It is then most likely that in His parables, Jesus is saying that Israelites are those who missed out on these rewards mentioned in the 1st, 3rd, and 6th Hours—the person who was invited to the wedding but beat up the king's servant, the lazy servant, and the foolish virgins. This is further validated by the words of the 1st Hour Exposition: "Who were those who were invited to the real banquet which was for God the Word, but the contrary antipathetic Jews whose names were eliminated from the Book of Life."

In His Crucifixion, Christ provided for us a New Covenant, one that was open to all who accepted and believed in Him. For that reason, St. Paul writes in His epistle to the Galatians that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" ([Galatians 3:28-29](#)). Therefore, these parables show how Israel is no longer Christ's chosen people but those who believe in Him, regardless of their previous religious affiliation.

### ***Always Remain Watchful and Stay Diligent***

Not all who say they are Christians will be able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. As Christ said during the Sermon of the Mount (the very beginning of His ministry), “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” ([Matthew 7:21](#)). This message is heavily emphasized through the readings and expositions provided during the blessed Wednesday Eve.

In the 3rd Hour Gospel, before providing an analogy to the master of the house, Christ says “Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” ([Matthew 24:36](#)). Additionally, in the 6th Hour Gospel, after sharing the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, Jesus likewise says “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour” ([Matthew 25:13](#)).

This message is also emphasized in the Expositions; in the Third Hour exposition, we read, “Let us awake and be alert in anticipation of the day of the Lord so that we may rejoice with Him in His dwelling-place and receive His clemencies and mercies.” Finally, the First Hour Exposition clarifies the symbolism behind the man who was invited to the wedding feast but did not have the proper clothing: “Who is this individual, but Judas, who lost his heavenly garment and become dressed with damnation [...] because he denied His master’s blessings and dared to betray Him.” Even a disciple, someone who was close and witnessed the miraculous works of Jesus firsthand, lost the reward of Heaven since he was not vigilant and watchful.

There are many ways to remain watchful and to avoid the snares of the devil. In the book *The Way of the Ascetics*, Tito Colliander says, “In the middle of his [the spider’s] web he [the spider] sits and feels the smallest fly and kills it. Likewise prayer watches in the middle of your heart: as soon as a trembling makes it known that an enemy is there, prayer kills it. To leave off praying is the same thing as deserting one’s post.” In this quote, Colliander is emphasizing the importance of prayer in remaining watchful. It is a weapon we can use to fight off the snares of the devil.

Additionally, remembering our impending death allows us to remain watchful. During the Midnight Hours of Agpeya, the Gospel for the First Watch is the same as today's 6th Hour Gospel, and the Gospel for the Third Watch is the same as today's 3rd Hour Gospel. During the Agpeya litanies, we pray, "O my soul, be mindful of that awesome day, and wake up and light your lamp with the oil of joy" (1st Watch, 2nd Litany). In daily prayers, at the end of every day, we remember His Second Coming. By remembering the time of our death, the time of our reunification with Him, we remind ourselves of what is to come. The Tuesday (Tuesday Day and Wednesday Eve) of Pascha is a time when Christ grants us instruction and parables, reminding us of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. To be truly filled with that joy and to partake of what Christ has set for us, we must remain watchful.

May we always remember our eventual deaths and remain vigilant in prayer so we may be united with Him for eternity.

### **Reflection Points:**

- *Am I actively doing "the will of the Father," or am I relying on surface-level faith (e.g., church attendance, labels)?*
- *How might remembering my eventual death help me live more fully today? What truths does it awaken in me?*

## **HOLY WEDNESDAY**

### **Introduction**

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

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

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

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

## **First Hour**

### ***Prophecies***

In the first prophecy of the first hour, we read from the book of Exodus ([Exodus 17:1-7](#)). In this reading, we see the people doubt Moses and the Lord saying, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” ([Exodus 17:3](#)). However, despite this doubt, the Lord still provides the people with water by instructing Moses to strike a rock. Thus, we see the Lord as a loving Father and as the overflowing Fountain of Life. Our Lord does not abandon us, even when we complain against Him.

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

The final prophecy of the first hour, from Hosea ([Hosea 5:13-6:3](#)), describes the importance of repentance and returning to the Lord.

Ephraim realizes his sickness and returns to the Lord to be healed. It is written, “Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up” ([Hosea 6:1](#)). In the same way, we must be aware of our many sins and make a concerted effort to gain healing through repentance and confession. As St. John Chrysostom explains: *“For Christ has brought the healing. He invited [us] to know the true divine revelation; he confirmed [us] through the Spirit to observe the commandments. He showed us again to be zealous followers by placing us beyond corruption and freeing us from the previous infirmities, namely, sin and passions.”*

### ***Gospel Reading***

The Gospel reading ([John 11:46-57](#)) illustrates the envy of the High Priest and Pharisees and their plans to arrest Christ. They were panicking, saying, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation” ([John 11:47-48](#)). Rather than glorifying Christ for all the miracles He was performing, the leaders of the Jews were blinded by their pride and arrogance. As St. Augustine of Hippo explains: *“But they had no thought of believing. The miserable men only consulted how they might hurt and kill Him, not how themselves might be saved from death.”*

Let us not be blind to the innumerable blessings our Lord Jesus Christ has given us. Rather, let us love Him with all of our hearts.

## **Third Hour**

### ***Prophecies***

In the first prophecy of the third hour, we read from the book of Exodus ([Exodus 13:17-22](#)). In this passage, we see God providing the Israelites with directions in the wilderness through “the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people” ([Exodus 13:22](#)). As seen by this, there is a stark contrast between the character of God and the character of Judas. Father Bishoy Kamel explains this saying: *“God cares for His people so much that He walks before them and looks after them. When the enemy draws near, He comes in between them and shields His people from their enemies. But you Judas, intervened*

*between the Lord and the Jews, not for peace, but for betrayal. Thus when we likewise commit sin or betray God, we are in complete opposition to God's nature and character."*

The second prophecy from Sirach ([Sirach 22:7-18](#)) explains how sinners are akin to fools. It is written, "Seven days do men mourn for him that is dead: but for a fool and an ungodly man all the days of his life" ([Sirach 22:12](#)). Sin leads to eternal death; thus, we must repent and confess to avoid being seen as a fool in God's eyes.

### ***Gospel Reading***

The Gospel reading ([Luke 22:1-6](#)) describes the moment in which Judas decided to betray our Lord Jesus Christ. It is written that "Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve" ([Luke 22:3](#)). Bede, a saint venerated in the Eastern Orthodox Church, explains this saying: "*Now many shudder at the wickedness of Judas, yet do not guard against it. For whosoever despises the laws of truth and love, betrays Christ who is truth and love. Above all, when he sins not from infirmity or ignorance but after the likeness of Judas seeks opportunity, when no one is present, to change truth for a lie, virtue for crime.*"

If we seek earthly desires over heavenly desires, we will fall into many sins, which will lead us to our destruction. Let us remember that we can fall into the same fate as Judas if we do not guard against Satan's temptations.

## **Sixth Hour**

### ***Prophecies***

In the first prophecy of the sixth hour, we read from the book of Exodus ([Exodus 14:13-15:1](#)). In this reading, we listen to how Moses split the Red Sea (through God's grace)—freeing the Israelites from Egypt. The Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and it led to his death along with the death of all his soldiers. On the other hand, Moses's heart was aligned with God's will, which led to his salvation and the salvation of all the Israelites. Meanwhile, the crossing of the Red Sea can be viewed as a sort of Baptism for the Israelites that was consecrated by the blood of the Egyptians. St. Augustine of Hippo contemplates further on this reading, saying: "This people of God, freed from a great and broad Egypt, is led, as through the Red Sea, that in baptism it may make an end of its enemies. For by the

sacrament as it were of the Red Sea, that is by baptism consecrated with the blood of Christ, the pursuing Egyptians, the sins, are washed away.

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

### ***Gospel Reading***

The Gospel reading ([John 12:1-8](#)) illustrates the story of Mary of Bethany anointing the feet of Jesus with expensive ointment. Rather than viewing this moment as a beautiful act of love, Judas questions it saying, “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” ([John 12:5](#)). Jesus answers him by saying, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me” ([John 12:7-8](#)). St. John Chrysostom explains the hardness of Judas’s heart due to the love of money, saying: ***“For a dreadful, a dreadful thing is the love of money, it disables both eyes and ears, and makes men worse to deal with than a wild beast, allowing a man to consider neither conscience, nor friendship, nor fellowship, nor the salvation of his own soul, but having withdrawn them at once from all these things, like some harsh mistress, it makes those captured by it its slaves.”***

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

## **Ninth Hour**

### ***Prophecies***

In the first prophecy of the ninth hour, we read from the book of Genesis ([Genesis 24:1-9](#)). This passage describes Abraham's blessing of the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca. Although this passage may seem rather out of place, the Church wisely uses it as a reminder that the relationship between our soul and God is that of a bride and groom. Jesus is often referred to as the bridegroom, while the Church is referred to as the Bride. In marriage, the bride and groom are made into one through the Holy Spirit. In a similar manner, through the Eucharist, we are united with Jesus Christ.

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

The final prophecy of the ninth hour is from Proverbs ([Proverbs 1:11-35](#)). This reading describes the importance of Wisdom and the Fear of the Lord. As described earlier, the fear of the Lord is the knowledge that there is a God and that each and every one of us is in a relationship with Him. It is written, "Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord" ([Proverbs 1:28-29](#)). St. Augustine of Hippo explains this saying: *"What is it then which Scripture says in many places: 'They shall call, and I will not hear them'? Yet surely you are merciful to all who call upon you.... Some call, yet call not upon him of whom it is said, 'They have not called upon God.' They call, but not on God. You call upon whatever you love: you call upon whatever you draw*

*to yourself, whatever you wish to come to you. Therefore, if you call upon God for this reason, in order that money may come to you, that an inheritance may come to you, that worldly rank may come to you, then you are calling upon those things that you desire may come to you; but you are making God the helper of your desires, not the listener to your needs.”*

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

### ***Gospel Reading***

The Gospel reading ([Matthew 26:3-16](#)) mentions both the story of Mary of Bethany anointing the feet of Jesus and of Judas’s agreement to betray Jesus. Judas sold our Lord and his salvation for 30 pieces of silver. What are we selling our Lord for? What sin are we committing that is hindering our relationship with God?

As seen throughout the Gospels, Jesus attempted to stop Judas numerous times from committing this sin; however, he was so blinded by pride and greed that no effort from our Lord could stop Judas. St. John Chrysostom explains this: *“Oh madness! How did covetousness altogether blind him! For he that had often seen Him when He went through the midst, and was not seized, and when He afforded many demonstrations of His Godhead and power, looked to lay hold on Him; and this while He was using like a charm for him so many, both awful and soothing words, to put an end to this evil thought. For not even at the supper did He forbear from this care of him, but unto the last day discoursed to him of these things. But he profited nothing. Yet not for that did the Lord cease to do His part.”*

### **Eleventh Hour**

#### ***Prophecy***

The one and only prophecy of the eleventh hour comes from the book of Isaiah ([Isaiah 28:16-29](#)). This prophecy ends the daytime Pascha on a more positive note, where the Lord promises that he will help us overcome any of our tribulations. The Lord says, “Behold, I am the one

who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: Whoever believes will not be in haste” ([Isaiah 28:16](#)). This foundation that the Lord established for us is our faith. As long as we remain steadfast in this foundation of faith, we will be able to pass through any tribulations. St. Ambrose of Milan explains this saying: *“The foundation of justice therefore is faith, for the hearts of the just dwell on faith. And the just man that accuses himself builds justice on faith, for his justice becomes plain when he confesses the truth. So the Lord says through Isaiah: “Behold, I lay a stone for a foundation in Zion.” This means Christ as the foundation of the church. For Christ is the object of faith to all; but the church is as it were the outward form of justice; it is the common right of all...”*

### ***Gospel Reading***

The Gospel reading ([John 12:27-36](#)) explains when Christ reveals Himself as the Light of the World. Jesus tells the crowd, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light” ([John 12:35-36](#)). These short statements by Christ encapsulate our faith. Christ is the Light of the World, and we have become sons of the light through the sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation, Confession, and Communion. St. Cyril of Alexandria explains this saying: *“He proved therefore that the faith which is in Him, through Whom a man comes to the knowledge also of the Father, is the way of salvation. And He names them sons of Light whether of Himself or of the Father, for He speaks of the Father as Light after having spoken of Himself as Light---in order to show that the Nature of Himself and of His Father is One: and we become sons of the Father, when, through the faith which is in Christ, we accept the Father Who is Light; for then shall we also be entitled children of God.”*

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

## Reflection Points:

- *What are my “thirty pieces of silver”? What do I sometimes choose over Christ?*
- *Am I more afraid of being exposed in sin, or of being separated from God because of it?*

# THE EVE OF HOLY THURSDAY

## First Hour: Voluntary Sacrifice & Genuine Love

The prophecy of the first hour is from Ezekiel. Ezekiel's prophecy describes a vision where he is lifted into the inner court, witnessing the glory of the Lord filling the temple. The Lord speaks to him, expressing His intention to dwell among the people of Israel forever, provided they repent and cleanse themselves of their defilement.

The prophecy emphasizes the significance of repentance and obedience to God's laws, urging the people to repent of their iniquities and follow the design and ordinances of the temple. It contrasts the sins of Israel with the promise of redemption through the sacrificial love of Christ, who willingly lays down His life out of love for humanity. This hour's exposition also emphasizes that Jesus was crucified not by force but out of His love for us.

The Gospel from John 10:17-21 highlights Jesus' assertion of His authority to lay down His life and take it up again, emphasizing that His sacrifice on the Cross is voluntary, not forced. St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine's interpretations further delve into the significance of Christ's voluntary sacrifice, contrasting it with the actions of hirelings and thieves. They stress the importance of genuine love and care for the flock, as demonstrated by Christ the Good Shepherd, in contrast to those who seek personal gain (thieves) or flee in the face of danger (hirelings).

Overall, the first hour centers on voluntary sacrifice and genuine love, drawing parallels between Ezekiel's prophecy and the sacrifice of Christ. It calls for us to examine ourselves deeply and commit to following Christ's example of sacrificial love and genuine care for others. As He is the good shepherd, we also must be good shepherds.

### **Third Hour: Pure Repentance & Purification Through Trials**

The third hour prophecy is from Amos. In Amos 4:4-13, Amos prophesies about God's call for repentance, recounting how, despite His blessings upon the people of Israel, they continued to ignore Him. God allowed various adversities to befall them in hopes that they would turn back to Him, but they remained stubborn in their ways. This passage serves as a reminder of the importance of repentance and returning to God in times of trial and darkness. As silver is purified in fire (Psalms 12 & 66), so are we purified in times of tribulation.

The Psalm for this hour (Psalm 54:21,1) reflects on the words of Christ as being as softened oil, replenishing and nourishing us, penetrating our hearts. Yet, simultaneously, His words are like a drawn sword as they reveal our thoughts and intentions; as St. Paul writes in Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

In the Gospel of Mark, the theme of repentance is continued in the story of Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus with costly oil. Despite her sins and extreme criticism from others, Jesus defends her actions, recognizing her love and her longing for Him. This act of anointing prefigures Jesus' burial, and Jesus Himself praises Mary, stating that her deed will be remembered wherever the Gospel is preached. We can also anoint Christ's head and feet through acts of faith, love, and service to others.

The third hour focuses on the theme of repentance. The Church has carefully selected these readings to highlight the loving repentance

exemplified by Mary of Bethany, the divine call for repentance in God's word, and how trials and tribulations often serve as catalysts for repentance.

### **Sixth Hour: Hardened Hearts**

In the Sixth Hour, the prophecy from Amos 3:1-11 conveys God's rebuke of Israel for their iniquities, warning them of impending adversity due to their disobedience. St. John Chrysostom says that adversities such as famine, disease, and death are not evil because they “become the sources of good chastening our pride, guarding our laziness, and leading us on to zeal, making us more attentive.” At the same time, St John Chrysostom explains that evil, like adultery, fornication, and covetousness, are sins worthy of punishment. Therefore, we must flee these sins.

In Psalm 139:1,2, David the Psalmist seeks deliverance from evil and violent men, urging reliance on God's strength. When surrounded by evil and temptation, we should always call upon the Lord's name and ask Him for His grace to strengthen our will.

John 12:36-43 illustrates the Jews' blindness to Christ's message due to their hardened hearts. Despite witnessing miracles, they refuse to believe, prioritizing worldly praise over divine acceptance. Fr. Tadros Malaty reflects on their missed opportunity for salvation and the consequences of their hardened hearts, saying, “They saw the Lord and heard Him, but due to the hardness of their heart their inward man did not hear, and neither did their inward vision see.”

The sixth hour concentrates on the theme of hardened hearts incapable of seeing God's work and stubborn in repenting. However, for those who are open to hearing God's word and are actively trying to live it, God says, “But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.”

### **Ninth Hour: Blasphemy through Unfaithfulness**

In the Ninth Hour, the prophecy from Ezekiel condemns the blasphemy committed against the Lord by the Israelites through their unfaithfulness and harlotry. Despite seeing the works of God and hearing His commandments, the Israelites decided to forsake Him for wood and stone. God emphasizes that He will not listen to their inquiries or respond to their requests until they change their hearts. He also says He will chasten them with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

However, this is not out of malice or revenge; instead, God does this for chastisement to bring them into a new covenant: “I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. I will purge out the rebels from among you and those who transgress against me” (Ezekiel 20:37-38).

Psalm 7:1,2 is a pleading to God to save us from danger, as He is the only One we trust and have hope in delivering us. The Psalm reads, “O Lord my God, in You I put my trust; Save me from all those who persecute me; And deliver me, lest they tear me like a lion, Rending me in pieces, while there is none to deliver.” The Psalm refers to the devil who “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Asking for God’s deliverance is the only resort to every attack, every temptation, and every sin. He is the one who protects us and keeps us under the shelter of His wings. He is our only refuge.

In John 10:29-38, the Jews attempt to stone Jesus for claiming unity with the Father, accusing Him of blasphemy. This echoes a tragic pattern seen throughout history and even until the present day: just as the Israelites blasphemed God through their lack of faith, as mentioned in the prophecy of this hour from Ezekiel, so too did the Jews blaspheme God through their stony hearts refusing to believe Jesus’ divinity despite his teachings and miracles. It’s also significant to note that the persecution Jesus faces mirrors the persecution faced by David, as expressed in the Psalm reading of this hour.

## **Eleventh Hour: Returning to the Source of Salvation**

In the eleventh hour, the prophecy from Jeremiah urges us to rise when we fall. God questions the people of Jerusalem, saying, “Will they fall and not rise?” (v. 4). He even rebukes them, saying, “Why have this people slidden back, Jerusalem, in a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit. They refuse to return. I listened and heard, but they do not speak aright” (v. 5). What is hindering us from getting closer to God? What is stopping us from rising after we fall? In his letter to the ‘fallen,’ St. John Chrysostom says something incredibly wonderful and encouraging: “Let us rise again, brethren, however late we seem to be. Let us stand again. Stand with prestige! To fall is not that serious. What is more serious is to stay down after without rising gain—to be coward and slothful, and to remain helpless with despair.”

The Psalm for this hour tells us that God is the source of strength, refuge, and salvation. Only by acknowledging and believing that He is the origin of all blessings and by entirely depending on God can we echo the words of David the Psalmist: “He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress; I will not be greatly shaken.”

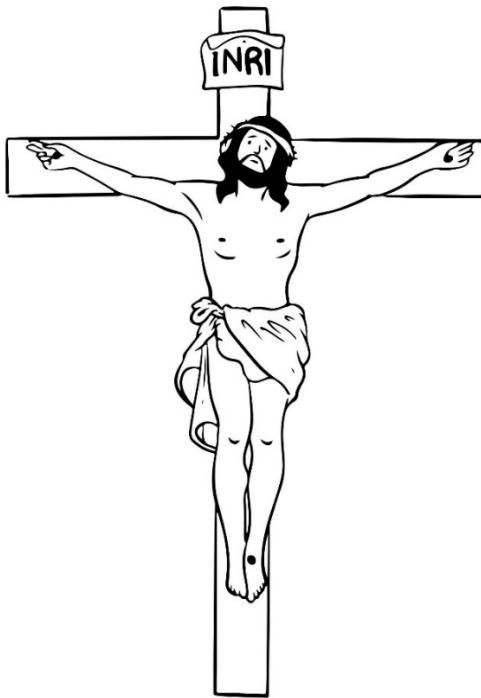
In John 12:44-50, Jesus emphasizes the unity between Himself and the Father, declaring that whoever believes in Him believes in the One who sent Him. He presents Himself as the light of the world, the source of salvation. Jesus also explains that He came to save the world, not judge it; however, when He comes back on the last day, He will judge those who reject Him. He asserts that His teachings are the Father’s command, which is everlasting life.

### **Reflection Points:**

- *Do I give to others out of duty, or out of genuine love? What does love-driven sacrifice look like in my daily life?*
- *How can I practically return to God today—what is one small, tangible step?*

# HOLY PASCHA WEEK BOOKLET

St. Mary & St. Athanasius Coptic  
Orthodox Church, 2026



COVENANT THURSDAY – FEAST  
OF RESURRECTION

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# COVENANT THURSDAY

## Introduction to Covenant Thursday

Holy Thursday of Pascha Week is one of the most momentous and impactful days during which we experience the final moments between Christ and His disciples before the coming Crucifixion—including the Last Supper and the washing of the disciples' feet.

The first hour of Covenant Thursday is notably different from the rites of all the other hours of Holy Week. First, we read the prophecy and sing **THOK TE TI GOM**. However, Matins is prayed during the 1st Hour to prepare for the upcoming liturgy. During Matins, we sing the Hymn of the Cross, mourn the kiss of betrayal that Judas is about to do, and sing the psalm in its shammy tune (the tune that **PEKETHRONOS** is sung in).

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

During Matins, we are reminded of the future betrayal of Judas and his fate by reading the Praxis from [Acts 1:15-20](#). Additionally, the deacons

walk around the church clockwise (rather than the traditional counterclockwise procession) as a reminder that Judas was of this world while they repeatedly sing, “Judas who has broken the law”, followed by the Psalm of the 1st Hour, “His words were softened above the oil. And they were arrows” (Psalm 54:21\*)—referring to Judas’s words.

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

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

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

Finally, during both Divine Liturgy and the eleventh hour, we read about Christ foretelling the betrayal of Judas. During this passage, Jesus tells the disciples that one will betray Him. Jesus reveals that Judas is the

one who will betray Him by taking a piece of bread, dipping it into wine, and giving it to Him. After this, Judas left.

## **First Hour:**

### ***Prophecy***

As briefly mentioned above, the prophecy of the 1st Hour ([Exodus 17:8-16](#)) emphasizes the power of the Cross. The Cross is not just a symbol of our faith; rather, it is a symbol of how Christ conquered death on our behalf. In this prophecy, Moses stands atop a hill and stretches his arms out to the Lord. When his arms were stretched out, Israel prevailed. However, when Moses's arms grew weary and he rested them, Amalek (the enemy) prevailed.

In the same way, the Cross needs to be our strength. We can only conquer death and have eternal rest because of the Cross. Thus, we must not rely on ourselves but rely on our Lord, who granted us salvation through the cross. As Origen the Scholar explains, ***“When Christ stretched His hands on the cross, He embraced the whole world...When Moses held up his hands, Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hands, to give them some rest, Amalek prevailed. Therefore, let us hold up our hands with the strength of the Cross of Christ; and let us, everywhere, raise pure hands in prayers, ‘without wrath or a doubting’, in order to be worthy of God’s help.”***

### ***Praxis***

Because Matins occurs during the 1st Hour, we read the Praxis ([Acts 1:15-20](#)). While the prophecy focuses on the power of the Cross, this reading focuses on the death that occurs if we abandon the Cross. Judas was one of the twelve, learning and spending time with Christ daily. As it is written, “For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry” ([Acts 1:17](#)). With all that he had learned, he was supposed to be a forefather of the Church, spreading the truth of Christ. Yet, he betrayed our Lord and abandoned his Savior. He hung himself and his entrails gushed out. Thus, the field that was purchased by the betrayal money became known as the Field of Blood—a reminder that abandoning our Lord leads to death.

### ***Gospel Reading***

The Gospel reading of the 1st Hour ([Luke 22:7-13](#)) tells the story of the Lord preparing the Passover with His disciples. From this, we see Christ's emphasis on establishing the Eucharist for us. Christ instructs His disciples, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters" ([Luke 22:10](#)). Why did He not tell them the name of the "man" carrying the jar of water? Christ knew that Judas had already planned on betraying Him. Thus, He vaguely did not say the man's name in order *"to prevent Judas from learning who the man was, and running to tell those who had hired him...He did this in order that Judas might not deliver Him to His murderers before the Feast of the Pascha which He desired to celebrate with them..."* (St. Cyril). Our Christ, the eternal Paschal Lamb, knew that He had to celebrate the Passover with His disciples so that He could establish the Eucharist that we still partake of to this day.

### **Third Hour:**

#### ***Prophecies***

The first prophecy of the 3rd Hour ([Exodus 32:30-33:5](#)) describes Moses speaking to our Lord, trying to atone for the people of Israel's sins. The people of Israel had offended God by worshiping the idol of a Golden Calf. Yet, instead of abandoning his people, Moses begs our Lord for atonement for their sins. Note the love and care Moses has for the people of Israel! As St. Clement of Alexandria explains, *"How great he is; he would rather die together with his people, than to get saved alone."* However, as we know, the only one who could truly atone for our sins is our Lord Jesus Christ—who conquered death on the Cross for our salvation.

The second prophecy of the 3rd Hour ([Sirach 24:1-11 RSV](#)) explains the mystery of the Holy Trinity as well as the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. The majority of the book is about "Wisdom" or the "Logos"—which refers to the Son of God. It is written, "I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist"

([Sirach 24:3 RSV](#)) and “From eternity, in the beginning, he created me, and for eternity I shall not cease to exist” ([Sirach 24:9 RSV](#)). These verses, while seemingly simple, are very deeply rooted in important theological concepts. St. Augustine explains them by saying that these verses can ***“demonstrate that the Son was begotten of the Father, but was not created by Him, nor did He come after Him, but existed from the beginning with Him.”***

### ***Gospel Reading***

The Gospel reading of the 3rd Hour ([Matthew 26:17-19](#)) is very similar to that of the 1st Hour, describing the Lord preparing the Passover meal with His disciples. While it may seem minor, it is important to note that the Lord kept the Passover—indicating that he is the fulfillment of the law and not opposed to it. As St. John Chrysostom explains, ***“Why did He keep the Passover? To indicate in every way and until the last day that He was not opposed to the law.”*** Our Lord did not come to break the covenant He made with Israel; rather, He came to fulfill that covenant.

Isn't it profound that the Crucifixion of Jesus coincided with Passover? Passover commemorates the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. To escape the final plague, the Israelites sacrificed a lamb and marked their doorposts with its blood. Hence, during Passover, it's customary in Jewish tradition to sacrifice and consume a lamb.

However, Jesus's Crucifixion represents an everlasting Passover for believers. His sacrifice on the Cross serves as the eternal lamb, atoning for our sins. Consequently, the Eucharist becomes our new "Passover," where we partake in the body and blood of Christ, our Savior. As St. Athanasius explains, ***“the Savior, also, since He was changing the typical for the spiritual, promised them that they should no longer eat the flesh of the lamb, but His own.”***

## **Sixth Hour**

### ***Prophecies***

The first prophecy of the 6th Hour ([Jeremiah 7:1-15](#)) is about the defiling of the temple. The Lord condemns the people of Israel saying, “Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord” ([Jeremiah 7:11](#)). In a literal sense, the Lord is angry at their hypocrisy. The people of Israel sin and stray away from Him, and then dare to come to the temple! In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ sees the people have no respect for the temple, and quotes the prophecy saying, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers” ([Matthew 21:13](#)). The temple (or the church in modern time) is the house of our Lord. Do we make our church a den of thieves? Do we act one way in the world and an opposite way when we are in church?

In the Old Testament, the temple is the dwelling place of the Lord. However, we now have the Holy Spirit within us, so we are temples of the Lord. Do we walk in the light and behave as if the Holy Spirit is in our hearts? Or do we only put on the facade of holiness while in the church?

In the second prophecy of the 6th Hour ([Ezekiel 20:39-44](#)), the Lord reveals His love and mercy for the people of Israel. The people of Israel strayed away from Him— worshipping idols and living sinful lives. However, our Lord does not seek to have revenge on the people. Rather, He wants to bring them back to Him and fulfill the covenant He made with their forefathers. As it is written, “As a pleasing aroma I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. And I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations” ([Ezekiel 20:41](#)). When we fall into sin, let us always remember that our Lord is a merciful and loving Father who is waiting for us to return to Him with open arms.

In the final prophecy of the 6th Hour ([Sirach 12:13-13:1 RSV](#)), the Lord warns us of associating with sinners and falling into sin. It is written, “Who will pity a snake charmer bitten by a serpent, or any who go near

wild beasts? So no one will pity a man who associates with a sinner and becomes involved in his sins” ([Sirach 12:13-14](#)). If we are constantly in the presence of those who stray from the faith, we will fall into sin.

Thus, the Lord clearly states that if we do not avoid these situations, He will not pity us. If we do not care enough to avoid situations that lead to sin, why should He have mercy on us? As St. John Chrysostom explains, *“When we pity not our own selves, tell me, who will pity us? If you see a man piercing himself with a sword, will you be able to spare his life? By no means. Much more, when having it in our power to do well, we do not do well, who will spare us? No one! Let us pity ourselves.”* We cannot ask the Lord to have mercy on us if we do not have mercy on ourselves.

### ***Gospel Reading***

The Gospel reading of the 6th Hour ([Mark 14:12-16](#)) is very similar to that of the 1st and 3rd Hours, describing the Lord preparing the Passover meal with His disciples. In this Hour, attention is drawn to the significance of the man carrying a pitcher of water. Christ instructs the disciples, saying, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him...” ([Mark 12:13](#)). Though seemingly minor, this detail holds profound symbolism.

Our redemption is by both blood (through crucifixion) and water (in baptism). It's remarkable that Christ, the ultimate sacrificial lamb, selected the setting for the final Passover based on the presence of a man carrying water. As St. Ambrosius explains, *“I wish God allows me also, to carry a pitcher of water, as the owner of that upper room did! What should I say about water? O Water, that raised above the universe, that defiled by human blood, and was a symbol of the exalted baptism! O water, that was granted to have the secret of Christ to cleanse all! ... You begin the sacraments and consummate them; In you is the beginning and the end!”*

## **Ninth Hour**

### ***Prophecies***

In general, the prophecies of the 9th Hour focus on the fulfillment of the covenant between God and Man—through Christ’s death on the Cross. The first prophecy of the 9th Hour (Genesis 22:1-19) recalls the story of Abraham and Isaac. God instructed Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, as a test of Abraham’s faith and love for our Lord. The story of Isaac directly foreshadows the story of Christ’s Passion. As it is prayed in the Fraction on Covenant Thursday, ***“Thus, the slaying of Isaac was a type of the shedding of the Blood of Christ, the Son of God, on the Cross for the salvation of the world. And as Isaac carried the firewood for the burnt offering, likewise Christ carried the wood of the Cross. And as Isaac returned alive, likewise Christ rose alive, from the dead and appeared to His Holy disciples.”*** Look at the abundance of love our Lord has for us! He sent His only Son, who was sacrificed on the Cross for our sins. He willingly bore our sins and endured suffering for our salvation.

The second prophecy of the 9th Hour ([Isaiah 61:1-7](#)) focuses on the Lord anointing us with the Holy Spirit. It is written, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me...” ([Isaiah 61:1](#)). It is only through the Crucifixion that we can be anointed with the Holy Spirit. As St. Cyril of Alexandria explains, ***“The return of the Holy Spirit to man in Christ, the incarnate God, the second Adam, is an everlasting return. The Holy Spirit descended on the second Adam for His righteousness; and righteousness in Christ is a steadfast one, because the union of divinity with manhood in the Person of Christ is steadfast... And this is a steadfast guarantee for humanity and its stability in the new life.”*** The consequence of Adam and Eve’s sin was the division between humanity and God. However, Christ’s sacrificial act on the Cross removed this division, allowing us to reunite with our Lord through baptism and chrismation.

The final prophecy of the 9th Hour ([Job 27:1-28:13](#)) focuses on the steadfastness of Job’s faith in our Lord. Job lost everything—his family, his livestock, his wealth, his health, etc. Yet, he refused to curse the Lord

and abandon his faith. He may question the Lord at times, but he never loses trust in Him. As it is written, “As God lives, who has taken away my right, and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter, as long as my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit” ([Job 27:2-4](#)). Is our faith akin to Job? If we suffer and struggle, do we give up on our Lord, or do we trust in Him?

### ***Gospel Reading***

The Gospel reading of the 9th Hour ([Matthew 26:17-19](#)) is identical to that of the 3rd Hour. Please refer to that section for contemplation on this reading.

## **Liturgy of the Waters**

### ***Church Rites***

Following the 1st, 3rd, 6th, and 9th Hours of Covenant Thursday Pascha, the priests and deacons dress in their liturgical vestments and move to the second chorus of the church to begin the Liturgy of the Waters. The water that is to be blessed is contained in a basin. The Liturgy of the Waters is prayed in the annual tune, with the priests' and deacons' vestments being in the traditional annual colors, instead of the dark colors worn in Pascha Week and funerals. The Liturgy of the Waters commemorates the time when the Lord Christ washed the feet of his disciples, on the day before His crucifixion and before He instituted the Eucharist during the Last Supper. In like manner, the Church maintains the order of these events by first blessing the waters and washing the feet, followed by the Divine Liturgy. The Church also obeys the commandment of the Lord, who said at that time, “ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you ([John 13:14-15](#)).

### ***Prophecies***

The first prophecy of the Liturgy of the Waters ([Genesis 18:1-23](#)) refers to the visitation of the Lord and two angels to Abraham and Sarah. As

stated earlier, in the Covenant Thursday Fraction, Isaac, who carried the wood of the burnt offering, is likened unto the Lord who carried the wood of the cross. The ram that was slain instead of Isaac is also likened to Christ, who was slain instead of us. Also, it is important to note how Abraham greeted the visitors. When Abraham saw the men approaching, He said “Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree” ([Genesis 18:4](#)). As Origen the Scholar explains, *“Abraham, the father and teacher of nations, is indeed teaching you by these things how you should receive guests and that you should wash the feet of guests. Nevertheless, even this is said mysteriously. For he knew that the mysteries of the Lord were not to be fulfilled except in the washing of the feet.”* Thus, it is fitting that the first prophecy read during the Liturgy of Waters describes both Isaac as a symbol of Christ and the washing of feet.

The second prophecy of the Liturgy of the Waters ([Proverbs 9:1-11](#)) describes Wisdom. Wisdom is the Lord Himself, which is why King Solomon prophetically writes that She (Wisdom) says, “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed” ([Proverbs 9:5](#)). The bread and wine, in this prophecy, is indicative of the Body and Blood of Christ that is given to us for the first time on Covenant Thursday.

The third prophecy of the Liturgy of the Waters is a summary of the events that occur in Exodus 14 and 15. It is written, “When Israel crossed the Red Sea, they walked through dry ground in the midst of the sea, and their enemies went into the sea; and the Lord brought upon them the water of the sea. Israel and all the house of Jacob were saved. They danced and sang this song: Let us sing to the Lord, for He is greatly glorified.” Just as crossing the Red Sea granted the Israelites victory over Pharaoh, the miraculous work of baptism (washing) grants us victory over the devil.

The fourth prophecy of the Liturgy of the Waters is a summary of the events that occur in Joshua 1 and 3. It is written, “Joshua and all the people went over Jordan, they treaded on stones that were immersed in water. Their feet strengthened and they defeated their enemies.” Similar

to the crossing of the Red Sea, the Jordan River crossing miraculously allowed Joshua and the Israelites to defeat their enemies. Once again, the water is a symbol of baptism, during which we are grafted into the body of Christ—that is, the Church.

The fifth prophecy of the Liturgy of the Waters ([Isaiah 4:2-4](#)) describes how the Lord washes away the filth of our sins. It is written, “...when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning” ([Isaiah 4:2](#)). This reminds the believers of the stain of sin, and the washing and cleansing that the Lord performed for the disciples that day, in baptism, and through continuous repentance. As St. Clement of Alexandria explains, “*The excellent spiritual washing through Baptism takes away the corruption of the soul.*”

The sixth prophecy of the Liturgy of the Waters ([Isaiah 55:1-56:1](#)) describes how we should have a thirst for the Lord. The Lord prompts us to seek Him, saying, “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters...” ([Isaiah 55:1](#)). These words urge the believer to direct his/her attention to the Lord. This also is a prophetic echo of the New Testament beatitude, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” ([Matthew 5:6](#)), and Christ’s conversation with the Samaritan Woman during which He says, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again” ([John 4:13-14](#)). St. Augustine echoes a similar message, saying, “*I wish we hunger and thirst for righteousness, to get our satisfaction. I wish our inner man hunger and thirst, to get the food and drink suitable for him.*”

The seventh prophecy of the Liturgy of the Waters ([Ezekiel 36:25-29](#)) describes how the Lord sprinkles water on us for cleansing. It is written, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you” ([Ezekiel 36:25](#)). Again, this sprinkling of the water is for purification from sin, and is a

reminder for the believer, who will receive a physical sprinkling, to strive for the spiritual cleansing as well. It is also written, “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” ([Ezekiel 36:26](#)). It is important to note that Baptism does not only cleanse us from sin but is also instills a new spirit (the Holy Spirit) within us.

The final prophecy of the Liturgy of the Waters ([Ezekiel 47:1-9](#)) directly foreshadows the Church of the New Testament with the sacrament of baptism. It is written, “Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar” ([Ezekiel 47:1](#)). This one verse is full of plenty of contemplation. As Father Tadros Malaty explains, *“What is this temple facing east, but the Church of the New Testament, that faces toward the Lord Christ — her East; and embraces the holy altar, on which the sacrifice of the New Testament is offered. The holy water that flows from under its threshold, is Holy Baptism, without which no one can enter into fellowship in the Church of Christ.”*

### *Pauline Epistle*

During the Liturgy of the Waters, the Pauline Epistle is read from [1 Timothy 4:9-5:10](#). The Church, in its wisdom, chose this passage as it describes what a believer is supposed to do when they have received the Holy Spirit through Baptism and have been cleansed of their sins. St. Paul urges the new believers in the Church, writing, “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” ([1 Timothy 4:12](#)).

After we receive the Holy Spirit, it is our duty to be an example of Christianity through our actions. If we receive the Holy Spirit, but then do not walk in the path of Christ, our faith is dead. As St. James writes in his epistle, “So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” ([James 2:17](#)). Thus, we need to live a life with Christ with our actions to truly display our faith. St. John Chrysostom echoes a similar sentiment,

writing, *“When a person finds that he been cleaned of all evil, that is his sins and wickedness have been forgiven, then he can produce good fruit and rejoice while he lives on earth too...You have to be an example of goodness in every way, and a model of Christian living. This will be a living testimony, a basis, and a yardstick for others seeking to lead a godly life.”*

### ***Gospel Reading***

The Gospel reading of the Liturgy of the Waters ([John 13:1-17](#)) describes the Lord washing the feet of his disciples on the night of his suffering. When it is read that the Lord girded Himself with a towel, the priest does the same. This towel is wrapped around the waist of the priest until the end of the Liturgy of the Waters, displaying that the priest is the symbol of Christ, and it is as if Christ is the one washing our feet during the service. The main point we will emphasize in this passage is that a Christian is, by nature, a servant. Christ, the Son of God, through His humility and love, washed the feet of His disciples. He tells them, “You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet” ([John 13:13-14](#)). St. Ambrose contemplates this passage, writing, *“I, then, wish also myself to wash the feet of my brethren, I wish to fulfill the commandment of my Lord, I will not be ashamed in myself, nor disdain what He Himself did first. Good is the mystery of humility, because while washing the pollutions of others I wash away my own.”* Let us embrace the same spirit of service that Christ exemplified with His disciples. As servants of the Lord, we must compassionately care for those in our midst, demonstrating genuine love.

### ***Litanies of the Liturgy of the Waters***

The litanies are supplications made by the priest, followed by the prayer “Lord, have mercy” by the congregation. The litanies draw comparisons between the physical and the spiritual, maintaining the theme of water and cleansing. For example:

- O, You who girded Himself with a towel and covered up Adam’s nakedness. You, who gave us the garment of Divine Sonship.
- You girded Yourself with a towel to cleanse us from the stains of our sins.
- O You who clothes Himself in light like a garment, girded Himself and washed the disciples' feet.

### *The Anaphora of the Liturgy of the Waters*

Upon hearing this Anaphora, we are reminded of the Anaphora that is prayed for in every Divine Liturgy—during which we lift our hearts to the Lord. However, the words are specific to the events of Covenant Thursday. For example:

- “You gave us this example, for after supper You arose, took a towel and girded Yourself and poured water into a basin, and began to wash your disciples feet...”
- “O you who has blessed at that time now also bless. Amen.”
- “Purify our inner being with the fruits of this Mystery. Amen.”

The priest then signs the water with the cross, and prays upon it with specific prayers, so that the water may be a source of blessing. After the Liturgy of the Waters, the priests, deacons, and congregations are washed with this water.

## **Liturgy of the Word**

### *Pauline Epistle*

During the Liturgy of the Word, the Catholic Epistle and Acts are not read. Rather, besides the Gospel, the only reading is the Pauline Epistle from [1 Corinthians 11:23-24](#). In this passage, St. Paul instructs the early Church to continue the sacrament of the Eucharist. He explains the depth and importance of this sacrament, saying, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes” ([1 Corinthians 11:26](#)).

Thus, as we approach the Eucharist, we must do so with a pure heart of repentance. Every time we partake of communion, we are truly eating the body and blood of Christ. As St. Cyril of Jerusalem explains, *“Having learnt these things and been fully assured that what looks like bread is not bread, though it tastes like it, but the Body of Christ; and that what looks like wine is not wine, though it tastes like it, but the Blood of Christ...”*

### ***Gospel Reading***

The Gospel reading of the Liturgy of the Word ([Matthew 26:20-29](#)) recalls the events of the Last Supper during which Christ instituted the Eucharist for us. The words from this Gospel, “Take, eat; this is my body” and “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” ([Matthew 26:26-27](#)) are akin to the prayer we repeat during every Liturgy in the Institution Narrative. Once again, we must remember that the bread and wine offered during Liturgy are truly and undoubtedly changed into the body and blood of Christ. Because of this, Christ dwells in us. As St. Cyril of Alexandria explains, *“When we eat the Holy Body of Christ, our Savior of us all, and drink of His Precious Blood, we thus obtain the Life in us, for we become as if we are one with Him; we dwell in Him, and He also reigns in us.”*

## **Eleventh Hour**

### ***Prophecy***

The prophecy of the 11th Hour ([Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#)) is one of the most remarkable prophecies of the suffering of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—further evidence that our Lord is the Messiah prophesied about in the Old Testament. This reading is also the first time during Pascha Week that we recall the suffering of our Lord, a fitting introduction to the coming sufferings that we read about during the Eve of Great Friday and Great Friday. The prophetic verses of Christ in this reading include:

- “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces; he was despised, and we esteemed him not” ([Isaiah 53:3](#)).

- “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted” ([Isaiah 53:4](#)).
- “But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” ([Isaiah 53:5](#)).
- “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth” ([Isaiah 53:7](#)).
- “And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth” ([Isaiah 53:9](#)).
- “Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors” ([Isaiah 53:12](#)).

Take your time to contemplate the depth of the prophetic verses listed above. Our Lord suffered and overcame death for each and every one of us. As St. Gregory Nazianzen explains, ***“He has been crushed and wounded; yet He healed every infirmity and every weakness.”***

### ***Gospel Reading***

The Gospel reading of the 11th Hour ([John 13:21-30](#)) describes the moment that Christ revealed that Judas was going to betray Him. It is written, “After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me” ([John 13:21](#)). Why was the Lord troubled at this moment? He was troubled because He knew, at this moment, that the time of His Passion was drawing near and that the soul of Judas was going to be lost.

As St. John Chrysostom explains, ***“He was troubled at the thought of His Passion being so near at hand, at the dangers to which His faithful followers would be brought at the hand of the traitor, which were even***

*now impending over Him....He was troubled by pity for perishing Judas.”* However, this trouble does not display the weakness of Christ but rather emphasizes His power. Christ could have easily avoided the Crucifixion; yet, out of His abundance of love for us, He willingly endured suffering and struggle. Through this moment of distress, we witness the unfathomable love of Christ, who, despite the power to avoid the Cross, chose willingly to endure the agony for the sake of our salvation.

### **Reflection Points:**

- *Have I truly allowed the Lord to wash me, or do I, like Peter at first, resist being made vulnerable before Him?*
- *Knowing Christ was troubled by Judas's betrayal, how do I respond to the idea that Jesus feels grief when I sin?*

## **THE EVE OF GREAT FRIDAY**

### **Introduction to the Eve of Great Friday**

In general, the Eve of Great Friday does not have one overarching theme; rather, the readings focus on the sequence of events leading up to Christ's crucifixion, including the Last Supper, our Lord's final message to His disciples, the prayer at Gethsemane, Judas's betrayal, and the initial rounds of Christ's trial. This Pascha service is longer and more intense than the other evening Pascha services throughout the week, building up our endurance and strength for the coming Great Friday service.

During this service, we add the phrase, *“The Lord is my strength and my praise, He has become to me a sacred salvation”* to the Paschal Hymn (*Thok Tek Ti Gom*). In His death on the cross and the trials leading up to His crucifixion, Jesus demonstrated profound strength. His willingness to endure excruciating pain and suffering without retaliation or bitterness revealed the depth of His love and commitment to humanity's salvation.

Look at what the Lord has done for us out of His love for mankind! Let us make Christ the foundation of our strength so that we may never fall and enter into the gift of salvation. As St. Augustine of Hippo explains, ***“Who then falls, when they are pushed, except those who choose to be their own strength and their own praise? For no man falls in the contest, except he whose strength and praise fails. He therefore whose strength and praise is the Lord, falls no more than the Lord falls.”***

## **First Hour**

### ***Prophecy***

In this prophecy ([Jeremiah 8:15-9:6](#)), the prophet speaks about the disappointment and grief of God as He sees the chosen people continue to stray from Him. God displays His abundance of love and mercy to the people of Israel, yet they continually turn their backs on Him. As it is written, “They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me “ ([Jeremiah 9:3](#)). These words are similar to Christ’s in the Sermon on the Mount, when He explains that the direct result of sin is the inability to *know God*. He explains that on Judgement Day, some may think they will receive salvation because of their faith, but faith without repentance does not lead to salvation. On Judgment Day, those who sin without repentance will be told, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness” ([Matthew 7:23](#)). Faith alone is not enough. We need to have a personal relationship with God, and it is impossible to develop this intimate relationship with Him if we continue to live in sin.

While Jeremiah is writing about the people of Israel in a general sense, it is important to interpret these words of lament on a personal level. Our Lord loves and cares for us with all his heart, yet we continue to fall away from Him—causing His heart to ache. The Lord explains His grief by saying, “Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night” ([Jeremiah 9:1](#)). As St. Paulinus, the Bishop of Nola, explains, ***“I am in need of a river of tears to cry for the harsh strikes that I deserve, for the sake of a life that I spent in sin! Break up, O Jesus, the stone that is my heart, to soften my inner man,***

*and to create in him a fountain of deity!* Every time we fall in sin, let us come back to our Lord, so that we may be able to continue to develop a sincere, intimate relationship with Him—our loving Father.

### ***Gospel Readings***

The Gospel readings of this hour ([John 13:33-17:26](#)) are unique as it is the only time throughout the entire Pascha week that all four Gospel readings are from the same author—St. John the Evangelist. These readings consist of Christ’s final message to His disciples. Our Lord knew that the time of His passion was coming soon, so He gave one final lesson to His disciples (and by extension, all of us) to ensure they would be prepared for the times to come.

The entirety of these four readings can be encompassed by a single verse, “In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” ([John 14:20](#)). Christ encourages His disciples by focusing on the beautiful gift of the Holy Spirit. He explains to them that although He is physically leaving them, He will never leave their hearts. Because of this, the disciples will always have the strength and courage to overcome any tribulations they face.

While the disciples and apostles received the Holy Spirit during Pentecost, we receive the same gift of the Holy Spirit during the sacraments of baptism and confirmation—making the entirety of Christ’s message applicable to our own lives. Because we have been entrusted with this gift, we must align ourselves with Christ so that we may live fruitful lives, bringing those around us to Christ.

The lessons that Christ gave to His disciples regarding the Holy Spirit can be summarized by the following points:

- **Aligning ourselves on the proper path ([John 14:6](#)).** We know the path by which we should walk, as He is the way, the truth, and the life.
- **Following His commandments ([John 14:15](#)).** We show our love to God by keeping His commandments.

- **Bearing fruit through the Holy Spirit ([John 15:4](#))**. Through the metaphor of the vine, we see that the only way we can be fruitful is by abiding in Him. If we do not abide in Him, we will not be fruitful and will lose the gift of eternal salvation.
- **Love one another as I have loved you ([John 15:12](#))**. The love that Christ shows us is different than typical love. The love of God is unconditional, limitless, selfless, and genuine. We must strive to love others with this depth and sincerity that we only see through our Lord. As St. Augustine explains, *“They who love one another for the sake of having God within them, they truly love one another.”*

After thoroughly explaining the gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples and how they must abide in His love, Christ prepares them for the inevitable tribulations to come. He informs them that they will be rejected by society, saying “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” ([John 15:19](#)). Yet, despite the hate they will receive from the society around them, he urges them to continue their ministry. He tells them, “In the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” ([John 16:33](#)). Suffering will always be a part of our lives. However, as long as we truly believe that God’s presence is enough, we will be able to rejoice in our struggles and let each struggle bring us closer to God.

## **Third Hour**

### ***Prophecy***

In this prophecy ([Ezekiel 36:16-23](#)), the Lord describes His disappointment in the people of Israel as well as His plan for the salvation of all the nations—through blood (crucifixion) and water (baptism). The passage begins by describing how the people of Israel have defiled our Lord’s name through sin. It is written, “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came” ([Ezekiel 36:22](#)). The Lord was upset that not only did the people of

Israel not know God, but they caused other nations to not know our Lord as well. Thus, the plan for salvation will be for *all the nations* (Gentiles), not just the people of Israel. As St. Augustine explains, ***“And thus the spiritual Israel is made up, not of one nation, but of all the nations which were promised to the fathers in their seed, that is, in Christ.”***

After explaining His goals, our Lord describes how he plans to save the nations, saying, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” ([Ezekiel 36:25-26](#)). This plan is indicative of the sacrament of Baptism—during which we are grafted into the body of Christ and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

### ***Gospel Readings***

In the third hour, the Church reads an account of Christ predicting Peter’s denial as they enter the Garden of Gethsemane in each of the four Gospels ([Matthew 26:30-35](#), [Mark 14:26-31](#), [Luke 22:31-39](#), and [John 18:1-2](#)).

In these passages, Christ warns the disciples of tribulations to come and quotes Scripture saying, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered” ([Matthew 26:31](#)). By doing so, Christ is explaining how He (the Shepherd) will be struck down and the sheep of the flock (the Disciples) will all flee in fear. In response to this, Peter proclaims, “Even though they all fall away, I will not” ([Mark 14:29](#)).

Look at the lack of humility Peter displays! Why does he think he is stronger or greater than any of the other disciples? St. John Chrysostom explains this saying, ***“For where he should have prayed, and have said, Help us, that we not cut off, he is confident in himself, and says, Though all men should be offended in You, yet will I never; though all should undergo this, I shall not undergo it, which led him on little by little to self-confidence.”***

Christ sees this self-confidence and lack of humility in St. Peter and thus warns him saying, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day until you deny three times that you know me” ([Luke 22:34](#)). As we continue to grow closer to our Lord, let us avoid the temptation of having pride. We, on our own, have nothing. It is only through God that we have strength, courage, and success.

## **Sixth Hour**

### ***Prophecy***

In this prophecy ([Ezekiel 22:23-28](#)), the Lord continues to condemn Israel for separating itself from God. He criticizes the false prophets, the priests, the princes, and the entire nation of Israel for falling away from Him. The chosen people of God have completely fallen away from Him. Even those who were supposed to be spreading the truth of God (the prophets and priests) spread lies and deceit!

Similarly, we (as Christians) are called by God to follow His instructions and spread the truth of the Gospel through our actions. Yet, do our actions reflect our faith? Do we spend every day striving to walk in the path that God has set out for us? Do we lead those around us to Christ, or do we cause them to stray away because of the hypocrisy of our actions?

However, although we sin and stray away from God just as Israel did, we still have hope due to Christ’s death on the Cross for our salvation. When we fall, we still have an opportunity to mend the gap between us and God. If we continually mend this gap, we will be able to live a life with Christ and spread his truth to those around us. As Father Tadros Malaty explains, ***“A gap came to separate me from You, O God! Who would fill this gap?! Who would stand in this gap before You to intercede on my behalf — the foremost among sinners?! Who would pay my debt and renew my nature, to encounter with You? I thank You, O My Savior; the incarnate Word of God; You alone bore my sins; You alone have been raised on the Cross; You have turned my earth***

*into heaven! You provided me with Your Holy Spirit working in me; and lifted up my heart to the bosom of God Your Father! O, You the amazing and unique Intercessor, grant me to love sinners, pray for them, and be self-sacrificed for their love.”*

### ***Gospel Readings***

In the sixth hour, the Church reads an account of Christ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane from each of the four Gospels ([Matthew 26:36-46](#), [Mark 14:32-42](#), [Luke 22:40-46](#), and [John 18:3-9](#)). From these passages, we will focus on the humanity of Jesus as well as the importance of prayer in times of hardship.

The grief and agony that Christ displays during these passages are indicative of His humanity. For Christ to be the eternal sacrifice for our sins, He had to take upon our human nature—thus, throughout the New Testament, we see Christ experience various human emotions—hunger, anxiety, grief, sadness, anger, etc. Jesus knew that the time of His crucifixion was drawing near, and He told His disciples, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me” ([Matthew 26:38](#)). Yet, it is important to note that our Lord is not sorrowful because of the upcoming suffering He would endure. Rather, as St. Jerome writes, ***“But He felt sorrowful...because of the most unfortunate Judas, the falling away of all the apostles, the rejection by the Jewish people, and the overturning of woeful Jerusalem.”***

He then pleads with the Father saying, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” ([Mark 14:36](#)). The Passion of Christ was a voluntary act, and He does not say these words to stop His Passion from happening. As St. Ephrem the Syrian explains, ***“He knew what He was saying to His Father, and was well aware that this chalice could pass from Him. But He had come to drink it for everyone, in order to acquit, through this chalice, the debt of everyone...”*** Rather, He pleads these words to teach us the importance of praying to God during times of distress and submitting ourselves to the will of our Father.

As our Lord is praying in the Garden, He is in such great agony that His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” ([Luke 22:44](#)). Seeing the human emotions and suffering that Christ displayed should heighten our love and appreciation for His sacrifice. Look at what the Lord suffered on *my* behalf!

## **Ninth Hour**

### ***Prophecies***

In the first prophecy of the ninth hour ([Jeremiah 9:6-10](#)), the Lord speaks of a specific sin that causes the chosen people to stray from Him—the deceitfulness of the tongue. He says, “Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceitfully; with his mouth each speaks peace to his neighbor, but in his heart he plans an ambush for him” ([Jeremiah 9:8](#)). Speech itself and the ability to communicate with others is a gift from God; however, it can be misused for evil. As St. James explains in his epistle, “From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so” ([James 3:10](#)).

Out of wisdom, the Church decided to read this prophecy at the same hour that the Gospels speak of the betrayal of Judas. Judas, as one of the twelve, was with our Lord during the entirety of His ministry. He learned from Christ, ate with Christ, and prayed with Christ—yet instead of using all that He learned for good, He let greed and the temptations of the world cause him to betray Christ. Origen the Scholar warns us of falling into the same sin, saying, “*Listen, all you covetous, you who have the disease of Judas. Listen and beware of the calamity! For if he who was with Christ, and performed miracles, and had the benefit of so much instruction—but because he was not freed from this disease and was sunk into such a gulf—how much more shall you, who do not so much as listen to the Scripture, who are constantly riveted to the things present, become an easy prey to this calamity,* We must identify the gifts that God has given us and ensure that we use them to glorify God rather than to lead others into temptation.

The second prophecy of the ninth hour ([Ezekiel 21:28-32](#)) foreshadows the moment when St. Peter severed the high priest's servant's ear with a

sword. The prophecy states, “A sword, a sword is drawn for the slaughter. It is polished to consume and to flash like lightning” ([Ezekiel 21:29](#)). However, after Peter struck the servant, Jesus tells him to “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me? ([John 18:11](#)). The prophecy echoes the same sentiment, as the Lord tells the people to “return it [the sword] to its sheath. In the place where you were created, in the land of your origin, I will judge you” ([Ezekiel 21:30](#)).

### ***Gospel Readings***

In the ninth hour, the Church reads an account of Judas betraying Christ from each of the four Gospels ([Matthew 26:47-58](#), [Mark 14:43-54](#), [Luke 22:47-55](#), and [John 18:10-14](#)). From these readings, we will focus on the depth of Jesus’s love for Judas, even during the moment of betrayal.

Jesus, the omnipotent and all-knowing Lord, knew that Judas would betray Him. Yet, despite this, did our Lord ever stop loving him? Did He ever stop teaching him? Did He treat him differently than any of the other disciples? No, quite the contrary. Even though the Lord knew the ill intentions building up in Judas’s heart, He never stopped loving him. As St. John Chrysostom explains, ***“For not even at the supper did He forbear from this care of him. But unto the last day talked to him of these things. But he profited nothing. But the Lord never ceased to do His part.”*** Likewise, our Lord still loves and cares for us, even when we fall away from Him.

While this is a good reminder of repentance and coming back to God, it is also a lesson on the true essence of a servant. A servant gives and loves, even when he receives nothing in return. Christ loved and cared for Judas even though He knew that He would receive nothing in return. St. John Chrysostom urges us to have the same spirit of service, saying, ***“Knowing this, then, let us also not intermit to do all things unto them that sin and are remiss, warning, teaching, exhorting, admonishing, advising, though we profit nothing.”***

We can see Christ's sincere care for Judas, even in the moment of His betrayal! Rather than displaying anger and admonishing Judas for betraying Him, Christ attempts to lead him to repentance, asking him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" ([Luke 22:48](#)). Dionysius of Alexandria explains the intentions of Christ at this moment, writing, "***How magnificent is the endurance of evil by the Lord who was even kissed His own traitor, and then spoke words even softer than a kiss! For He did not say, "O you abominable one, or traitor, is this what you do in return for great kindness?" He simply says, "Judas" using his first name (Lk. 22:48). This is in the voice of One commiserating with another or who wished another to come back to Him, not the voice of anger.***"

Oh, Lord, your love for humanity is truly immense! Even amidst betrayal, you persist in guiding us towards repentance. May we aspire to mirror such profound love towards others, and always recall that despite our shortcomings, we have a Father who eagerly awaits our return.

## **Eleventh Hour**

### ***Prophecy***

In this prophecy ([Isaiah 27:11-28:15](#)), the Lord tells the people that a remnant of Israel will be saved. In the time of Christ, the ones who were supposed to believe Him (the people of Israel) were the ones who accused Him of being a false prophet and crucified Him. It is fitting that this prophecy is read during this hour, as it is the first time during Pascha week that we read about the trials and accusations against Christ.

However, despite many being against our Lord, there was still a remnant of Israel that believed in Christ and followed Him. As it is written, "In that day the Lord of hosts will be a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people, and a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate" ([Isaiah 28:5-6](#)). To those of Israel who believed in Christ, our Lord granted them salvation and strength. As St. Cyril explains, "***The Lord of hosts will crown the believers with hope and glory, that is, with hope of***

*future blessings and with glory because they will reign with him. They will become the recipients of the highest honor and will be worthy of adoration and glory. What glory can be compared with that received in the kingdom of Christ?"*

### ***Gospel Readings***

In the eleventh hour, the Church reads an account of the accusations against Christ and Peter denying our Lord from each of the four Gospels ([Matthew 26:59-75](#), [Mark 14:55-72](#), [Luke 22:56-65](#), and [John 18:15-27](#)). From these readings, we can contemplate Christ as the sacrificial Lamb and witness the repentance of Peter.

It is important to note the stark contrast between the High Priest's anger and fervor compared to our Lord's silence during the accusations. It is written, "Then the high priest tore his robes and said, 'He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy'" ([Matthew 26:65](#)). Yet, despite this outward rage, Christ did not respond. Why? If He were to respond, it would be as if He were defending Himself. St. Augustine explains the silence of Christ, writing, "***When He did not open His mouth it was reminiscent of the figure of a lamb. It was not as one of bad conscience convicted of sins, but as one who in His meekness was being sacrificed for the sins of others.***" In His silence, our Lord unveiled His divine purpose as our Redeemer. O Lord, enduring beatings, lashings, false accusations, and spitting because of my transgressions! Your love for me is immeasurable.

On a separate note, all the Gospel readings of this hour focus on Peter denying Christ. When Christ had initially told Peter that he would deny Him, Peter strongly proclaimed, "Even though they all fall away, I will not" ([Mark 14:29](#)). Yet, as Christ predicted, Peter denied Him three times. St. Peter, one of the most prominent forefathers of our Christian faith, denied our Lord. Yet, rather than continuing in his wrongful ways, Peter immediately realizes what he did and repents. It is written that "...immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.' And he broke down and wept" ([Mark](#)

[14:72](#)). St. Ambrose contemplates on Peter’s repentance saying, “Peter also wept bitterly. He wept so that he could purge his sin with tears. If you want to deserve pardon, you should wash away your guilt with tears...”

Lord, each time I fall into sin, I deny You. Yet, help me to recall Your suffering and sacrifice for my wrongdoing. Let my repentance be sincere, tears of true remorse, leading me to receive the ultimate blessing of eternity in Your presence.

### **Reflection Points:**

- *Am I actively developing a personal, intimate relationship with God, or am I passively relying on “faith” without repentance?*
- *Even as Judas betrayed Him, Christ called him “friend.” How can I extend love and grace even toward those who hurt me?*

# GREAT FRIDAY

## **Introduction**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, as we contemplate Christ’s sacrifice, we should remember that Christ died for each one of us on a personal level. As St. Augustine explains: *“We see His blood as He dies. We see the price offered by the redeemer, touch the scars of His resurrection. He bows His head, as if to kiss you. His heart is made bare open, as it were, in love to you. His arms are extended that He may embrace you. His whole body is displayed for your redemption. Ponder how great these things are. Let all this be rightly weighed in your mind: as He was once fixed to the cross in every part of His body for you, so He may now be fixed in every part of your soul”* (GMI 248, St. Augustine of Hippo).

Through the Cross, Christ granted you eternal life, opened a path for your salvation, provided you with a weapon against any pain or struggle, redeemed your corrupt nature, allowed you to be with Him in His heavenly kingdom. As we contemplate further on each hour, remind yourself of the enormity and beauty of Christ's love for you. As St. Cyril of Jerusalem explains: *"The Cross is the crown of victory. It has brought light to those blinded by ignorance. It has released those enslaved by sin. Indeed, it has redeemed the whole of mankind. Do not, then, be ashamed of the Cross of Christ; rather, glory in it. Although it is a stumbling-block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles, the message of the Cross is our salvation. Of course, it is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it was not a mere man who died for us, but the Son of God, God made man"* (*Treasures of the Fathers of the Church Series, Volume III*d)

## 1<sup>ST</sup> HOUR GREAT FRIDAY

### Prophecies

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

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

The next two prophecies from Isaiah ([Isaiah 1:2-9](#) and [Isaiah 2:10-21](#)) describe God's grief in seeing His people forsake him and foreshadow Christ's resurrection. The Lord tells Isaiah, "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." The Lord is a loving Father, yet the people of Israel

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

The next two prophecies from Jeremiah ([Jeremiah 22:29-23:6](#) and [Jeremiah 3:1-6](#)) demonstrate how false teachers (like the Pharisees) have caused the people to stray away from God. The Lord says, “You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them” ([Jeremiah 23:2](#)). However, our Lord loves us, even when we stray away. He says to the people of Israel, “But you have played the harlot with many lovers; yet return to me” ([Jeremiah 3:1](#)). Thus, even though we fall because of sin, He redeems us and allows us to come back to Him saying, “...I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing...” ([Jeremiah 23:3-4](#)). Origen the Scholar explains how *“this is a new kind of goodness; God receives the soul, even after harlotry, if she returns and repents from her whole heart”* (*Treasures of the Fathers of the Church Series, Volume III*).

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

Prayer of Thanksgiving says, “for it is You Who have given us the authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy.”

The next reading from Zechariah ([Zechariah 11:11-14](#)) is a remarkable prophecy of Judas’s betrayal of Christ—particularly for 30 pieces of silver. It is written, “Then I said to them, ‘If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.’ And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver” ([Zechariah 11:12](#)). After this, the prophecy even indicates that the 30 pieces are thrown back into the “house of the Lord,” just as Judas threw the coins back into the temple. St. Cyril of Jerusalem explains the accuracy of this prophecy, saying, “*A great and unerring wisdom of the Holy Spirit! For he did not say ten or twenty but thirty, exactly the right amount*” (*Catechetical Lectures, St. Cyril of Jerusalem*).

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

### **Psalm: Psalm 26:12, 34:11-12**

“For unjust witnesses rise up against me, and injustice lies to itself.  
Unjust witnesses rose up against me; asking me things I knew nothing about. They repaid me evil for good and bereavement for my soul.  
Alleluia”

### **Gospel Readings**

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

slightly different, they all display how Christ handled the situation—through humility and silence.

Rather than fighting back against the ridiculous false accusations, Christ remained silent. There was no need to argue back, He had already taught the people all there was to teach. As St. Ephrem the Syrian explains: *“He spoke in order to teach but kept silent in the tribunal. He was not silent over that which was exalting us, but He did not struggle against those who were provoking Him. The words of His calumniators, like a crown on His head, were a source of redemption. He kept silent so that His silence would make them shout even louder, and so that His crown would be made more beautiful through all this clamor”* (*Treasures of the Fathers of the Church Series, Volume III*).

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

Jesus’ silence and humility marveled Pontius Pilate—to the point where he washed his hands of Christ’s crucifixion. However, the stubbornness and jealousy of the people (particularly the Pharisees), eventually forced Pilate’s hand into crucifying our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Liturgy of St. Gregory, we describe Christ’s actions on our behalf, saying, *“You showed me the power of Your authority. You granted sight to the blind. You raised the dead from the graves. You raised up human nature through the word. You revealed to me the dispensation of Your tender compassions. You endured the injustice of the wicked. You gave Your back to scourging. You surrendered Your cheeks to slapping. For my sake, O my Master, You did not turn Your face from the shame of spitting.”*

Let us remember the hardships Christ endured on our behalf and the marvelously humble and peaceful manner in which He approached these

hardships. If Christ can remain silent even when crowds wanted to kill Him, how much easier is it for us to remain silent and keep our peace during our relatively minute struggles in life?

### **Reflection Points:**

- *Despite repeated unfaithfulness, God continually offers mercy and restoration. What does this reveal about His character? How does it shape my view of Him as Father?*
- *The Liturgy of St. Gregory says, “You gave Your back to scourging... For my sake.” What personal response does this stir in my heart?*

## **3<sup>RD</sup> HOUR GREAT FRIDAY**

### **Prophecies**

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

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

**68.1, St. Jerome).** Meanwhile, because Ephraim was on Jacob’s left side and Manasseh was on Jacob’s right, Jacob had to cross his hands to bless them—prophesying the passion of Christ on the cross.

The next prophecy, read from [Isaiah 50:4-9](#), may sound familiar to the congregation, as parts of it are read during the Gregorian Liturgy. This prophecy is remarkably accurate to what our Lord Christ endured, “I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting” ([Isaiah 50:6](#)). It pains the heart to see how the world that our Lord loves so much rejected him. As St. Jacob of Serugh explains. ***“You ignorant, how did you dare to spit on His face? How did the earth bear to watch that scene? Instead of the slave who sinned, the Master Himself bore all that shame” (Divine Love, St. Jacob of Serugh).*** Let us truly contemplate and appreciate the greatness of the Lord’s love for us as seen through the suffering He endured.

After this, another prophecy from Isaiah ([Isaiah 3:9-15](#)) is read that describes how God’s chosen people would reject Christ. Isaiah writes, “Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves” ([Isaiah 3:9](#)). Many who should have accepted Christ rejected Him, while many of the Gentiles who did not know God before Christ accepted Him. St. Justin Martyr explains this, ***“Indeed your hand is raised to do evil. You have killed Christ and did not repent...As for us, we pray for your sake, and for the sake of all mankind, as we were taught by Christ, the Lord, who instructed us to pray even for our enemy, and to love those who hate and curse us.”***

One more prophecy is read from Isaiah ([Isaiah 63:1-7](#)) that foreshadows the brutal suffering that Christ endures. In this passage, the Holy Spirit testifies through Isaiah, saying, “Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress?” ([Isaiah 63:2](#)). The redness of the wine can be compared to the blood that stained Christ’s clothes. Meanwhile **“the treading also, and pressure of the winepress, is repeatedly dwelt on; because just as the drinking of wine cannot be attained to unless the bunch of grapes be first**

trodden and pressed, so neither could we drink the blood of Christ unless Christ had first been trampled upon and pressed” (*Epistle 62.7, St. Cyprian*). As we partake of the Eucharist every liturgy, let us remember the blood that Christ endured on our behalf.

The final prophecy of the third hour is from the book of Job ([Job 29:21-30:10](#)). In the book of Job, it is written, “they abhor me; they keep aloof from me; they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me” ([Job 30:10](#)). This spitting of the face is similar to that seen in Isaiah 50. Christ was persecuted for our sake and disrespected, similar to how Job was rejected by those around him. St. Augustine of Hippo puts it rather simply, saying, *“They really curse the face of Christ”* (*Augustine of Hippo Annotations on Job*).

### **Psalm: Psalm 37:17, 21:16**

“For I am ready for wounds, and my pain is continually with me. For many dogs surrounded me, an assembly of evildoers enclosed me. Alleluia”

### **Gospel Readings**

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

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

*therefore, demanded the son of their spiritual father, the devil, but Jesus they crucified. And to this day, there are those like them who have chosen Antichrist, the substitute messiah, the son of the father, and have rejected Christ, the true Messiah” (TGM, Theophylact).*

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

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

Finally, the most detailed aspect of these Gospel readings is the torture that our Christ endured before the Cross. He was whipped on our behalf. He was beaten on our behalf. He was stripped on our behalf. He was humiliated on our behalf. A crown of thorns was placed on His head on our behalf. Yet, despite all of this, Christ's embarrassment was actually in reality an act of power, mercy, and love. As St. Augustine explains: *“What a grand spectacle! To the profane a laughingstock, to the pious a mystery. Profaneness sees a king bearing a cross instead of a scepter; piety sees a King bearing a Cross, on which He nails Himself, and afterwards to nail it on the foreheads of kings. To profane eyes, this was contemptible, which the hearts of saints would afterwards glory in” (Tractates on John, Tractate 117, St. Augustine).*

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

### **Reflection Points:**

- *Do I take the gift of the Eucharist lightly, or do I remember that it was purchased by the crushing of Christ, as symbolized by the winepress imagery (Isaiah 63)?*
- *What part of Christ's suffering touches me the most deeply—His silence, His humility, His physical pain, or His love for those who rejected Him?*

## **6<sup>TH</sup> HOUR GREAT FRIDAY**

### **Prophecies**

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

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

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

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

### **Pauline Epistle**

The sixth and ninth hours also include a reading from the Pauline Epistles in addition to the Old Testament prophecies. In the sixth hour, the reading is [Galatians 6:14-18](#). In this reading, St. Paul describes the power of the Cross, and how Jesus made the most humiliating death into one of power and glory. Because of this, St. Paul talks about *boasting* in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. What does he mean by boasting in the cross? St. John Chrysostom explains this: ***“What is the boast of the Cross? That Christ for my sake took on Him the form of a slave, the enemy, the unfeeling one. Yes, He so loved me as to give Himself up to a curse for me. Who can be comparable to this!... Let us then not be ashamed of His unspeakable tenderness; He was not ashamed of being***

*crucified for your sake, and shall you be ashamed to confess His infinite solitude?... More clearly by those wounds than by any argument, than by language, do I vindicate myself. For these wounds utter a voice louder than a trumpet against my opponents, and against those who say that I play the hypocrite in my teaching and speak what may please men. For no one who saw a soldier retiring from the battle bathed in blood and with a thousand wounds, would dare to accuse him of cowardice and treachery, seeing that he bears on his body the proofs of his valor, and so should you, he says to judge of me”*  
(Commentary on Galatians, St. John Chrysostom).

### **Psalm: Psalm 37:21-22 & 21:16-18,8**

“They have rejected me, the beloved one, as an abominable dead carcass; they have pierced my body with nails. Do not forsake me, O Lord, O my God. They pierced my hands and my feet. They numbered all my bones, they divided my garments among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots. They spoke with their lips, they shook the head, saying, ‘He hoped in the Lord, let Him rescue him; Let Him save Him since He delights in him. Alleluia”

### **Gospel Readings**

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

The account from the Gospel of Matthew describes, in detail, the suffering that Christ endured. Matthew describes the events saying, “And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head and put a reed in His right hand. And kneeling before Him, they mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they spit on Him and took the reed and struck Him on the head. And when they had mocked Him, they stripped Him of the robe and put His own clothes on Him and led Him away to

crucify Him” ([Matthew 27:28-31](#)). Crucifixion was the most humiliating and brutal method of execution, and Christ endured all the brutality that went along with it. However, each manner of torture that Christ endured illustrated His glory and His love for us. As St. Hilary of Poitiers explains: *“The beaten Lord is dressed in a scarlet robe, a purple cloak and a crown of thorns, and a reed is placed on His right hand. Bending their knees before Him, they mock Him. Having taken upon Himself all the infirmities of our bodies, He is covered with the scarlet blood of all the martyrs destined to reign with Him, and He is cloaked with the high honor of the prophets and patriarchs in purple cloth. He is also crowned with thorns, that is, with the former sins of the remorseful Gentiles, so that glory might derive from the destructive and useless things, plaited on His divine head, which they contrive. The sharp points of the thorns aptly pertain to the sins from which a crown of victory is woven for Christ. The reed symbolizes the emptiness and weakness of all those Gentiles, which is held firm in His grasp. His head, moreover, is struck. As I believe, not much harm was done to His head from being struck with the reed; however, the typical explanation for this is that the bodily weakness of the Gentiles that was previously held in Christ’s hand finds comfort now in God the Father, for He is the head. But amid all this, while Christ is mocked, He is being adored”* (On Matthew 33.3, St. Hilary of Poitiers).

The account from the Gospel of Mark focuses on the mocking that Christ endured on the Cross. The people mocked Him saying, “Aha! You Who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross! ([Mark 15:29-30](#)). Also, the Pharisees and leaders of the Temple laughed at Jesus saying, “He saved others; He cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe” ([Mark 15:31-32](#)). The reading mentions that even those who were crucified alongside Jesus mocked Him. Jesus appeared weak to those who viewed Him. To them, how could this Man, hanging on the Cross, be the Son of God? As St. Augustine explains, *“Such He appeared on the cross, such when crowned with thorns did, He exhibit Himself, disfigured, and without comeliness, as if He had lost his power, as if not the Son of God. Such*

*did He seem to the blind.” Little did they know that three days later He would resurrect from the dead, declaring the power of His Godhead to the entire world”.*

The account from the Gospel of Luke focuses on the repentance of the thief on the right hand of Christ, now known as St. Dismas (Dimas the thief). While the other thief, along with the people mocked Christ, St. Dismas shouted out saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds, but this Man has done nothing wrong” ([Luke 23:40-41](#)). He then begged our Lord saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” ([Luke 23:42](#)). As we know, Jesus had mercy on St. Dismas, accepted his repentance, and comforted him saying, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise” ([Luke 23:43](#)). St. Cyril of Jerusalem describes the beauty of this moment saying: *“they were both transgressors, but one of them is no more; the other, who rejected salvation until the end, though his hands were tied, yet his tongue kept blaspheming... For one, it was the end of his life, but the beginning of his repentance and salvation... Remember Me, O Lord, to You I cry out; the eyes of my mind are closed but remember me! I do not say remember my deeds, for which I am frightened... Everyone is kind to his fellow traveler... I do not say remember me now, but when You come into Your kingdom. What power has illuminated your soul? Who taught you to worship the despised Who was crucified with you?”* (*Catechetical Lectures, 13.30, St. Cyril of Jerusalem*).

The account from the Gospel of John focuses on the title Pilate placed on Christ’s Cross, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” ([John 19:19](#)). The Chief Priests and Scribes were furious at Pilate saying, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’ Pilate answered, ‘What I have written I have written’” ([John 19:21-22](#)). St. Ambrose contemplates this title, writing: *“The superscription is fittingly above the Cross because Christ’s kingdom does not belong to His human Body but to His divine authority. The superscription is fittingly above the Cross, He shines above the Cross*

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

### **Reflection Points:**

- *What does it mean for me to boast in the Cross as St. Paul describes in Galatians 6? How can I live that out daily?*
- *What does the thief’s prayer—“Remember me...”—mean for me personally? Have I made it my own prayer?*

## **9<sup>TH</sup> HOUR GREAT FRIDAY**

### **Prophecies**

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

The first prophecy ([Jeremiah 11:18-12:13](#)) relates directly to Christ’s crucifixion on the Cross. In this prophecy, Jeremiah writes, “But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know it was against me they devised schemes, saying, ‘Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more’” ([Jeremiah 11:19](#)). In this prophecy, we see Christ as the true “gentle” Lamb being led to the slaughter. Moreover, the way Christ would be killed is through the “tree.” As Origen the Scholar explains, ***“If the Lord Christ was not crucified and did not die, the grain of wheat would have stayed alone, and the multitudes would not have got fruit by Him and followed Him. But His death gave fruits, represented by all Christians. So, if death has produced all these fruits, how much more would resurrection produce?!” (On Jeremiah, Homily 10.1-3, Origen the Scholar).***

The next prophecy from Zechariah ([Zechariah 14:5-11](#)) foreshadows the darkness that follows the death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In

the prophecy, Zechariah writes, “On that day there shall be no light, cold, or frost. And there shall be a unique day, which is known to the Lord, *neither day nor night*, but at evening time there shall be light” ([Zechariah 14:6](#)). This in detail prophecy describes how darkness would come after Christ’s death, but light would reappear in the ninth hour. Thus, there is no day or night because the sun disappeared and reappeared before the end of the day. *As St. Cyril of Jerusalem explains: “It was not day, for the sun did not shine without interruption from rising to setting, but from the sixth hour to the ninth hour there was darkness. The darkness was interposed, but God called the darkness night. Therefore, it was neither all light, so as to be called day, nor all darkness, so as to be called night; but after the ninth hour the sun shone forth” (Catechetical Lectures, 13, St. Cyril of Jerusalem).*

### Pauline Epistle

In the ninth hour, the reading for the Pauline Epistle comes from St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians ([Philippians 2:4-11](#)). In this letter, St. Paul describes both the humility and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ as seen through His Death on the Cross. He writes saying, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” ([Phillipians 2:4-8](#)). Christ came down from the glory of Heaven and became man out of His selfless love for us. As St. Hilary of Poitiers explains: *“To assume the form of a slave, He emptied Himself out of obedience. He emptied Himself that is from the form of God, which means equality with God...Humility is hard, since the One Who humbles Himself has something magnificent in His nature that works against His lowering. The One Who becomes obedient, however, undertakes the act of obedience voluntarily. It is precisely through the act of humbling that He becomes obedient” (On the Holy Trinity, St. Hilary of Poitiers).*

Moreover, from the events on the Cross, we can see how Christ honored and obeyed his Father, the ultimate fulfillment of the commandment, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” ([Exodus 20:12](#)). As St. John Chrysostom explains: *“He honored the Father all the more, not that you may honor Him less but that you may marvel all the more. Here we learn that He is truly a Son who honors His Father more than all else. No one could have honored God the Father more than God the Son. The measure of His humility corresponds with the depth of His humanity...It was a great thing, ineffably great, that He became a slave”* (Commentary on Philipians, St. John Chrysostom).

### **Psalm: Psalm 69:1-2, 21**

“Save me, O God, for the waters flood my soul. I am stuck in the mire of death, and there is no place to stand. They gave me gall for my food, and they gave me vinegar for my drink. Alleluia”

### **Gospel Readings**

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

Even in His Death on the Cross, Christ displayed His power, dominion, and authority over life and death. When humans die, the moment in which they take their last breath is out of their control. However, during Christ’s death on the Cross, he shouted with a loud voice and yielded up His soul to the Father, displaying the control He has over Life and Death. As St. Augustine explains: *“Those robbers crucified next to Him, did they breathe their last when they wanted to? They were held fast by the chains of the flesh because they were not the creators of flesh...But the Lord took on flesh in the Virgin’s womb when He wished it. He came forth to humanity when He wished it. He departed*

*from the flesh when He wished it. This is a sign of power, not of necessity” (Tractates on John, St. Augustine).*

Moreover, St. Ambrose of Milan describes the meaning behind Christ’s declaration on the Cross: *“He suitably ‘gave up’ the Spirit because He willingly gave Him up. Matthew says ‘yielded up His Spirit’ because what is yielded is spontaneous, but what is lost is unavoidable. Since this is true, he added, ‘with a loud voice.’ He did this with a glorious declaration that He descended to death for our sins. I do not blush to confess what Christ did not blush to proclaim in a loud voice. This was a clear revelation of God witnessing to the separation of the Godhead and the flesh” (Exposition of the Gospel of Luke, 10.27, St. Ambrose of Milan).*

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

**Reflection Points:**

- *How can I grow in humility, remembering that even the Son of God chose the path of service, suffering, and surrender?*
- *Jesus didn’t “lose” His life—He offered it. What is God asking me to offer up freely in love?*

## 11<sup>TH</sup> HOUR GREAT FRIDAY

**Prophecies**

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

The first prophecy from Exodus ([Exodus 12:1-14, 43](#)) tells the story of the first Passover. The Lord instructs Moses to tell the Israelites in Egypt to sacrifice a Lamb and cover their doorposts with its blood. If

the blood was on the doorposts, the Angel of the Lord would not kill their firstborn (the tenth plague of Egypt). The criteria for the Passover Lamb and how Christ fulfilled the same criteria can be seen below. In Exodus, the Lord tells Moses that the Passover Lamb must be:

1. Without blemish ([Exodus 12:15](#)).
2. A young male, ([v. 15](#)).
3. Examined four days from the selection of the sacrifice (10th of Nissan).
4. Slain in public.
5. Roasted in the fire ([v. 8, 9](#)).
6. Left without none of its bones broken ([v. 46](#)).
7. A saving lamb for the children of Israel, they placed its blood on the doorposts of the Israelites ([v. 7](#)).

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

1. Was without blemish, in whom was found no guile or deceit ([John 1:47](#)).
2. Was a young male, estimated to be 30 years old at the start of His ministry and 33 at the time of His Crucifixion.
3. Entered into Jerusalem on the 10th of Nissan to be heavily examined by the Jews.
4. Was brutally slain on the most populated time of the year in Israel.
5. Endured the fire of sufferings, accusations, and ridicule.
6. Was crucified without any of His bones broken ([John 19:36](#)).
7. Whose blood shed on the Cross saves us all from our sin ([Romans 5:9](#)) and redeems us from our condemnation ([Colossians 1:14](#); [Hebrews 9:12-13](#); [Revelations 1:5](#))” (*The Holy Pascha: Great Friday and Bright Saturday*, Treasures of the Fathers of the Church Series, Volume 3d).

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

### **Psalm: Psalm 142:6-7, 30:5**

“I spread out my hands to You. Hear me speedily, O Lord; my spirit faints within me. Turn not Your face from me, lest I become like those who go down into the pit. Into Your hands I shall entrust my spirit; You redeemed me, O Lord God of truth. Alleluia”

### **Gospel Readings**

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

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the focus is on the supernatural events that occurred. St. Matthew writes, “and behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised...” ([Matthew 27:51-53](#)). St. Ambrose of Milan explains the meaning behind the veil being torn: “*The veil is torn. This declared the division of the two peoples or the profanation of the mysteries of the synagogue. The old veil is torn so that the Church may hang the new veils of its faith. The veil of the synagogue is taken away, so that we may see the inner mysteries of religion with unveiled eyes of the mind* ([2 Corinthians 3:14](#)). *Even the centurion confesses the Son of God Whom he had crucified* (*Exposition of the Gospel of Luke, St. Ambrose of Milan*).

St. Jerome also comments on the supernatural events, saying: *“The literal meaning of the great signs is undoubtedly that both the heaven and earth and all the things within them wished to acclaim their crucified Lord. It seems to me, however, that the trembling earth and other signs also represent a type of believers, namely, those who once were comparable to a graveyard but who, having abandoned the errors of their former ways and having softened their stony hearts, have come to acknowledge the creator”* (Commentary on Matthew, St. Jerome).

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

The Gospel of John focuses on Christ’s side being pierced. When the soldiers went to check if Christ and the two thieves were dead yet, they saw that the thieves were alive, but Christ had died. So, they broke the legs of the two thieves to accelerate their deaths and pierced the side of Christ. This fulfilled the prophecy of David the Psalmist, “He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken” ([Psalm 34:20](#)). When his side was pierced, blood and water spewed out—symbolizing the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. St. John Chrysostom explains this: *“Blood and water came out’—not simply without a purpose, or by chance, did those fonts come forth, but because by means of these two together the Church consists. And the indicated in the Mysteries know it, being by water indeed regenerated [in Baptism], and nourished by the blood and the flesh [in the Eucharist]”* (Homily 85, St. John Chrysostom).

### Reflection Points:

- *Can I say with confidence, “Into Your hands I entrust my spirit”? What holds me back from surrendering completely to God’s will?*
- *The centurion was changed when he witnessed the Cross. How has Christ’s sacrifice changed me—and what further transformation is He still inviting me into?*

## 12<sup>TH</sup> HOUR GREAT FRIDAY

### Prophecies

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

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

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

Father Tadros Malaty explains the significance of these two prophecies, *“So if the Lamentations express what bitterness our sins have done to the Lord, then Jonah's hymn lifts up the partition to reveal God's victory over Hades and His redeeming work which lifts the believers to*

*the Holies in an unspeakable glorious joy” (Patristic Commentary on Jonah, Father Tadros Malaty).*

**Psalm: Psalm 87:6, 22:4, 44:6,8**

“They laid me in the lowest pit, in dark places an in the shadow of death. Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. **Your throne, O God, is forever and ever [Alleluia].** Your royal scepter is a scepter of uprightness. Myrrh and stacte and cassia pour forth from Your garments. Alleluia.

**Gospel Readings**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Reflection Points:

- *Jeremiah’s lament speaks of deep sorrow and suffering—but also of hope. When I go through hardship or grief, do I give space for both sorrow and trust in God’s goodness?*
- *St. Gregory Nazianzen said, “Yesterday I was crucified with Christ; today I rise again with Him.” What needs to die in me so that I can rise more fully with Christ?*

## BRIGHT SATURDAY

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

This night begins with Psalm 151. In this Psalm, God chose David to defeat Goliath. David, who was weak yet still defeated Goliath, is a symbol of our Lord, Who weakened himself on the Cross and descended into Hades, yet defeated Satan. After the Psalm, the Church

then sings the First Canticle from [Exodus 15](#): “Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD, saying, ‘I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea...’” This is the praise that the Jews chanted when they crossed the Red Sea after being freed from slavery in Egypt. Likewise, we chant this Canticle in the same manner, which symbolizes our freedom from death.

After the Sixth hour and the beginning of the Ninth hour, the entire Book of Revelation is read, as it tells us how God will take the Church from this world of pain and death and bring Her to eternal life, and is full of praises to God for His salvation and anticipation for His return.

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

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

### **Reflection Points:**

- *How does Christ’s apparent weakness on the Cross become the greatest strength and power in my life?*

- *Bright Saturday is a time of waiting, stillness, and hope. How do I respond in spiritual “waiting periods”—with patience, trust, or restlessness?*

## FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION

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

Jesus Christ's resurrection was a sign that the work of the Father for the salvation of the world had been completed. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world to die for our sins, and He did, so that we can live through Him. When Mary said to the Lord, while thinking He is the gardener, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away” ([John 20:15](#)), she was looking for Christ's body not yet understand the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead “For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.” ([PS.16:10](#)). Just as Mary was eager to find the Lord, we must also be eager in following Him and the example that He set for us. Jesus then says to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (Which means Teacher) ([John 20:16](#)). The way Christ called her name was in a way that no one else could. He said her name with

limitless love. Jesus is the good Shepherd, and He calls his flock by name, just as He called Mary's name, and when He calls our name, we arise and follow in His footsteps.

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

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

### **Reflection Points:**

- *Mary rose early and went to the tomb while it was still dark. How eager am I to seek Christ—especially in the quiet, hidden moments of life?*
- *What does Christ's Resurrection mean to me personally—not just theologically, but in the way I view sin, suffering, death, and eternity?*
- *How can I become a witness of the Resurrection in both word and action today?*