

Fifth Week of Great Lent

In the Divine Services for the fifth week of Great Lent the Holy Church continues to call us to an active bearing of the Lenten efforts, appealing: "Through abstinence the faithful have a fortress with God, through others let us youthfully run the holy course". "In fervent faith let us burn up the lustful passions with abstinence, and flee from the icy cold of sin; with the streams of our tears let us quench the eternal flame". "Let us make our own pure fasting, tears, meditation on the divine things, and every other virtue; and let us now offer our Lady to Christ". The general consolation is encouraging to the bearing of the Lenten effort, and the Holy Church presents us the idea that half of the effort is already accomplished and that its end, Christ's Resurrection, is near. "Having passed the middle point," hymns the Holy Church, "in this dedicated way of fasting, let us go forward joyfully to the part that still remains, anointing our souls with the oil of good deeds. So let us be worthy to venerate the divine Passion of Christ our God, to attain His dread and holy Resurrection". Together with this the Holy Church motivates her children to fervent continuation of bearing the Lenten efforts and reminds them about "the most glorious grace" "the most honorable fast, through which the prophet Elijah found the fiery chariot, and Moses received the Tablets; Daniel was magnified, and Elisha raised the dead, the Children quenched the fire, and all men are reconciled to God", and inspires us that "good fasting feeds our hearts, ripening within us thoughts pleasing to God, and causing the abyss of our passions to dry up, and with the rain of compunction it cleanses those who in faith offer praise to the Almighty", and that "the fasting of the ascetics receives their reward" from God: "Peace and illumination and the healing of our broken souls", "mercy on our souls", "a sweetness that grows not old". Such exhortations strengthening us in the ascetic efforts of fasting, the Holy Church inspires us to pray to the Lord that He grant, "The season of Lent will end peacefully". The intensification at the end of the Lenten expanse of promoting an unrelenting way of life pleasing to God, the Holy Church even during the present week continues to remind us that we have run into sin, similarly to running into robbers, and inspires us to expect mercy from the Lord. In particular Thursday and Saturday of this week are marked with special destination.

On Tuesday at Compline we sing the service from the Menaion appointed for the Saint on Thursday of the Great Canon. On Tuesday there is a reading of the Great Canon and the serving of the Presanctified Liturgy, if Annunciation Day falls on Wednesday or Thursday (see below). **On Wednesday evening and on Thursday Matins and Vespers** we ring "the beautiful bells", that is, not Lenten. **On Wednesday at Vespers** besides the 5 stichera of St Joseph the Studite we sing

the 24 alphabetic stichera of St. Andrew of Crete from which each sticheron ends in the words: "O Lord, before I perish utterly, save me"; refrains for them begin from the last verse of Psalm 140 (from the verse: "fall into their own nets"); after the end of the refrains of the psalm, for the rest we sing: "Glory to Thee, our God, Glory to Thee". The Little Compline is said in the cells. The Midnight Service is also done in the cells." **At the meal** those who want to partake of oil and wine for the labor of the Vigil; paying attention that it remains that we are saved by abstinence: the vast majority is to fast without measure".

Thursday of the Fifth Week

At Matins on this day the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete is read in its entirety once a year, which was read in four parts on the first four days of the first week, and the Life of St. Mary of Egypt is read after the Sessional Hymn (Kathisma). According to this feature of the Thursday Matins it is called either the St. Andrew of Crete or the St. Mary of Egypt Thursday. In the Canon are collected and stated, as was stated above (see page 510), all the exhortations to fasting and repentance, and the Holy Church repeats it now in its fullness to inspire us new strength for the successful end to Lent. "Since", it is said in the Synaxarion, "the Holy Forty Day Lent is drawing near the end so that men should not become lazy, or more carelessly disposed to the spiritual efforts, or give up their abstinence altogether," that this Great Canon is offered. It is "so long, and so well-composed, as to be sufficient to soften even the hardest soul, and to rouse it to resumption of the good, if only it is sung with a contrite heart and proper attention". And the church Typikon (Ustav) orders the Great Canon to be read and chanted slowly and "with a contrite heart and voice, making three prostrations at each Troparion". For the same purpose of abstinence and strength, and attention to repentance is the reading of the Life of the Venerable Mary of Egypt. According to an explanation of the same Synaxarion, the Life of the Venerable Mary also "manifests infinite compunction and gives much encouragement to the fallen and sinners", representing itself to us as a paradigm of true repentance, and an example of the unutterable mercy of God. It serves as the continuation of the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete and a transition to the order of the following Sunday. Reading the Canon of St. Andrew and Mary of Egypt on the Thursday of the Fifth Week was established from the time of the Sixth Ecumenical Council.

Kontakion, tone 6

My soul, my soul, arise. Why are you sleeping?

The end is approaching,

And you will be confounded.

**Awake, therefore, that you may be spared by Christ God.
Who is everywhere present and fills all things.**

Concerning, whether it is necessary **during the reading** of the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete to intone the **Litany** after the 3rd, 6th, and 9th odes, the practice varies (The Church Messenger (Tserkovnyi Vestnik 1892, No. 35).

After Matins "**we sing the whole service quickly** (that is, without singing and prostrations), labor for the sake of the Vigil". On Thursday the **Presanctified Liturgy is served and the fast is lightened**: "we eat with oil and drink wine, labor for the sake of the former". If **Annunciation** falls on Wednesday or Thursday of the 5th week the singing of the Great Canon is transferred to Tuesday of the same week. If Annunciation falls on Wednesday then the hymns for the Forefeast of Annunciation is not sung on the eve of the feast, but on Monday. If Annunciation falls on Friday; then on Thursday we sing the Canon, and the hymns for the Forefeast is not sung on the eve of Annunciation, but on Wednesday (Typikon (Ustav), March 25).

On Friday "at the meal we drink wine, labor for the sake of the Vigil", if one wishes. We say the Little Compline; this Compline and the same for the Midnight Service is done in the cells; we sing the Canon for the Departed in the cemetery.

Fifth Saturday of Great Lent

The service on this Saturday is called the Praise of the Most Holy Theotokos, because on this day "we sing the hymns of praise" to the Most Holy Theotokos in memory of the triple deliverance of the imperial city of Constantinople from the attack of enemies through Her intercession (see March 10). In the reign of Heraclius (in 626) the Persians from the East and the Scythians or Avars from the west blockaded Constantinople. Patriarch Sergius took the icon of the Most Holy Theotokos called the Hodigitria (refer to July 28), and her encased robe, in a cross procession to the walls of city and when he dipped the robe of the Mother of God into the water, the sea began to boil, and the ships sank, and the unwelcome enemies were exterminated. The people spent the whole night in prayer in the Blachernae church, which is on the seacoast, singing the thanksgiving hymns to the Mother of God (Akathist). A similar deliverance of Constantinople from the Agarians occurred during the reign of Constantine Pogonatus (in 670), Leo the Isaurian (716-740), or, according to other reports, during the reign of Michael III (864) from the Agarian and the Scythian Ascold and Dir. The Holy Church entered into the universal use of the thanksgiving hymns to the Theotokos, performed on the 5th Sunday of Great Lent as the first deliverance of Constantinople was about this time. With thanksgiving for former

deliverance from enemies, the Holy Church connects the prayer to the Most Holy Theotokos with even freeing us from all misfortunes, looking to the Mother of God as the Helper in prayers and repentance. Reminding believers about the heavenly Mediatrix and Intercessor of the Christian race, the Holy Church thus confirms repenting in the hope of greater help in one's spiritual efforts, for She never abandoned the suffering and grieving needing Her help, even in the struggle against external enemies.

Troparion, tone 8

**When the archangel understood the mysterious command,
He came to the house of Joseph with haste,
Proclaiming to the unwedded lady:
The One who bowed the heavens by His condescension is taking abode in you.
As I behold Him in your womb, taking the form of a servant,
I am frightened but cry: Rejoice, O unwedded Bride.**

Kontakion, tone 8

O victorious leader of triumphant Hosts.

We your servants delivered from evil, sing our grateful thanks to you, O Theotokos,
**As you possess invincible might set us free from every calamity,
So that we may sing: rejoice, O unwedded Bride.**

The Typikon (Ustav) calls these "Hymns of Praise" to the Theotokos the "Akathist" (α. = not, and καθίζω = I sit, -- often in the Typikon we read instead of Akathist -- "not sitting") because during the singing of this hymn one should not sit. The Deacon George Pisidijskim of the Great Church in Constantinople composed the Akathist on the occasion of the miraculous deliverance of the inhabitants of Constantinople from their enemies in 626. The Akathist consists of 12 Kontakia and 12 Eikoi (according to the number of letters in the Greek alphabet); the first Kontakion of the Akathist is "O Victorious Leader" is not included in the number 12 of the Kontakia but serves as a theme of the Akathist. Each Kontakion ends with the refrain: "Alleluia", and each Eikos ends with the angelic greeting to the Theotokos: "Rejoice, O unwedded Bride". The Akathist is divided into two parts. The first 12 odes (up to the 7th Eikos) comprise the first part of the Akathist, having historical content: in them are found the history of the incarnation and the first years of life of Jesus Christ. The remaining 12 odes comprising the second part of the Akathist, has dogmatic and moral content: in them the Kontakia describe the mystery of the incarnation of God the Word and

the abundant grace bestowed on Him, but the Eikoi glorify the Mother of God for Her magnification, her majesty before God and the good deeds, pointing Her out to the faithful. The entire Akathist is read in four parts, after the Little Ektenia the first and second of the appointed Kathismas, also after the third and sixth Odes of the Canon. Each section begins and ends in the singing of the Kontakion "O Victorious Leader". In last section, besides this, before this Kontakion one repeats the first Eikos: "The First of Angels". At the singing "O Victorious Leader" one censes the entire temple, beginning at the altar. The Typikon (Ustav) says to read the Akathist in the sanctuary; but some find it more convenient to read it in the middle of the church before the analogion with an icon of the Praises of the Theotokos and with one or two candle stands before the analogion. Thus for the reading each article of the Akathist the priest leaves the sanctuary through the Royal Doors. After the reading he returns to the sanctuary, and the Royal Doors are closed. At the reading of the Akathist the deacon accompanies the priest and censes before the analogion. At Matins we sing the Great Doxology. **"At the meal** we eat cooked food with oil and we drink wine, thankful for our Most Holy Lady Theotokos for her past miracles".

*S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 0523-5
Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © January 9, 2004. All rights reserved.*