

C. Passion Week

The last week before Pascha is devoted to the commemoration of the last days of the mortal life of the Savior, His suffering, death and burial and is why it is called *Passion Week*. It is also called *Great* because of the significance and greatness of the events that occurred in it. "During this week", as St. John Chrysostom teaches, "the ancient tyranny of the devil is destroyed, death is trampled down, the powerful are in bonds and their weapons are destroyed, sin is expiated, the curse and opening to paradise is removed, heaven has ceased to be inaccessible, people came closer to the angels, the walls of division are broken down, the boundaries are seized. The God of peace has reconciled the heavenly and the terrestrial".

The divine services of this great, according to its internal meaning and sense, week, the Holy Church has also arranged, with respect to its external meaning and sense, majesty, having adorned them with wisely positioned readings from the Prophets, the Epistles and the Gospel, with sublime, inspired hymns and a whole order of deeply meaningful, reverent rites. Everything that is described or predicted not only in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament is represented or related to the last days and hours of the mortal life of the God Incarnate, - all this the Holy Church reduces to one living and majestic image which gradually unfolds before us in the Divine services of Passion Week. Already at Vespers on Palm Sunday the Holy Church invites the faithful from the solemn feast of Palms to flow together to the divine feast of the mystery of the passion of the Lord. Then, with the approach of Passion Week, the Holy Church, recalling in the divine services the events of the last days of the mortal life of the Savior, with the attentive eye of love and reverent vigils, so as to say, after each step, listens attentively to each word, and wants to lead us also to enter into the very spiritual situations of the coming voluntary passion of Christ the Savior, gradually leads us in the steps of the Lord to the full extent of His way to the cross, from Bethany up to the Place of the Skull, from His royal entry into Jerusalem and to His final moment of expiation for human sins by the suffering on the cross, and further on to the bright celebration of the resurrection of Christ.

On the first three days the Holy Church strenuously prepares believers for the passion of Christ. During these days at the Sixth Hour readings are prescribed about the mysterious visions of the Prophet Ezekiel, who prophesied the foundation of the Church of Jesus Christ on earth, Who, having Himself drunk the sorrows of all our afflictions, made all these afflictions sweet and saving for His true followers. The readings from the book of Exodus prescribed for Vespers is devoted to the memory of the distress of the Hebrew people in Egyptian slavery from which this nation was delivered after they have tasted the lamb is the prototype of Pascha. This memory of the Holy Church inspires believers that

slavery to the devil is much worse than slavery to the Egyptians from which we are delivered by the new Pascha, Christ, Who suffered for us. The second reading in Vespers is taken from the Book of Job. The uncomplaining transference of all the heavy afflictions and temptations sent by the will of the Heavenly Father on this righteous man, serves as a prototype of the suffering of Christ for our sins, and also gives us a lesson of uncomplaining transference of troubles and misfortunes in our life.

Conforming to the fact that before His suffering Jesus Christ spent the whole day in the temple teaching the people, the Holy Church distinguishes these days with especially long Divine services. Trying to gather and concentrate the attention and thoughts of the faithful on a broader scale to the entire Gospel story of the incarnation of the God-man and His service to the human race, the Holy Church during the first three days of Passion Week reads through the Four Gospels during the Hours. With this annunciation the Holy Church also means to show that Jesus Christ in all the events of His mortal life was revealed as true God and true man, and that therefore only His suffering are saving for us.

As in first three days of Passion Week many various meaningful events which have the closest relation to the passion of Christ were accomplished and that these events are also reverently remembered by the Holy Church on those days on which they happened. In the prescription of specially selected Gospel readings for the first three days of Passion Week in Matins and in the Presanctified Liturgy the Holy Church enlightens the faithful through the Gospel narratives about the events of each day and edifies them through the talks and conversations that the Savior made on these days. Thus, the Holy Church persistently leads us to the Divine Teacher, with His disciples, now in the temple, now to the people, now to the tax-collectors, now to the Pharisees, and everywhere she enlightens us with those words, which He Himself offered directly to His hearers on these days. Preparing the believers for worthy contemplation and fervent co-participation in the sufferings of the Savior on the cross, the Holy Church offers the character of the primary grief and touching destruction of our sinfulness on a broader scale during the Divine Services of the first three days of Passion Week.

The Great Lenten services terminate with the Vespers of Wednesday and the especially significant services begin with rites of completely different structure. In the church hymns, the sound of crying and the complaints of the guilty human soul are silenced and there come the days of another cry filling the hearts of believers and from this time on penetrating all the Divine church services, - a cry from the contemplation of the horrifying torture and suffering of the Very Son of God on the cross. During the same time other feelings, even of indescribable joy for their salvation, boundless gratitude to the Divine Redeemer, delight the hearts and fill the souls of the believing Christian. Crying innocently for the suffering, the pierced and the crucified, pouring out bitter tears under the cross of the Savior, we also experience an inexpressible joy from the knowledge that after the crucifixion of the

Most Holy Word on the cross, we the perishing will resurrect with Him. Through the fullness of the sacred narrations, the deeply supportive hymns and, finally, the whole order of reverent rites and sacred customs, the Holy church during the days of the passion of Christ will bless the soul of the Christian with such abundant feelings of sadness and joy, boundlessly touching and life-giving, that the religious revival and inspired delight of the believing Christian soul during these days does not yield to any description - no word is able to express it. Consistently developing the amazingly majestic story of the passion of the Lord, the Divine Services of Passion Week gives us the full possibility in our mind of translating ourselves to those days in Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives, on Mount Zion, in Gethsemane, on Golgotha, in Joseph of Arimathea's garden similarly to the myrrh-bearing women who ran "very early" to the tomb of the Savior, in order to see His life-bearing resurrection. Narrowly pulling us together with the voluntary passion borne by our Savior, the Divine Services of Passion Week delivers to us the priceless opportunity to thoughtfully behold the streams of His most holy blood poured out for us, and to hear his last words and His divine teachings as if directly from His most Immaculate lips before His death. In a word, being present in church during Passion Week, the last days of the Savior vividly representing everything as if the events happened in our presence, we in our mind pass through everything with majestic feelings and immense instruction. So close to the heart of the Christian in his mind and heart is the story of the sufferings of Christ, "let us go with Him and let us be crucified with Him". Therefore Passion Week reveals itself as the most significant time of the year, incomparably ennobling the soul of the Christian and adjusting it to the acceptance of the highest ideas and impressions, - by the season, by the supplying of plentiful food for religious Christian thought and heavenly satisfaction and delight to the believing heart _).

In all Passion Week, except for Saturday, **at Matins** instead of "God is the Lord" sing "Alleluia". On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday in Matins after "Alleluia" sing the touching Troparion: "Behold, the Bridegroom comes at midnight", by which the Holy Church uplifts the faithful to constant spiritual wakefulness. On Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday read the Gospel (even though there is no Polyeleos) and after Psalm 50 (on the same days, except for Thursday) the prayer: "Save, O God, Thy people". From Monday and ending on Thursday, after the Canon in Matins sing the touching Exapostilarion, or Hymn of Lights: "Thy Bridal Chamber", three times; "the first time it is sung by the Canonarch in the middle of the church". In the 3rd, 6th and 9th **Hours** during the first three days in the very middle of the temple are read the Four Gospels _) from chapter 1 of Matthew up to chapter 14 of John. The Holy Gospel is divided into 9 sections, the Gospel of St. Luke is in 3 sections, and the remaining Gospel, each, is in 2 sections. During the reading of the Gospel the Royal Doors are opened, and are closed after its reading. During the 3rd Hour before the reading of the Gospel

the priest vested in a phelonion, censes around the analogion (with the Gospel), and the altar and the whole church and the brethren according to rank; during the 6-th Hour he only censes the Gospel; "during the 9-th Hour he censes the gospel, the whole temple, and the brethren" (see the Typicon (Ustav) and the Triodion for The Order for Great Monday). On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday **the Liturgy of the Presanctified** is served. The order for it is found in the Typicon (Ustav) in the Order for Great Monday; "If there is no Presanctified Liturgy", look in the same place. **If a temple feast falls** on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday,, then sing the service to the temple on Palm Sunday. If the temple feast falls on Friday or Saturday sing the service to the temple on Monday or Tuesday of Bright Week. In order to pay full attention to the commemorated events during all of Passion Week **Panakhidas and Akathists** are not sung in church. During all Passion Week except for the liturgies on Great Thursday and Saturday (see below), **the vestments** used are black in color _). **For meals** we eat xerophagy and are satisfied by them. And like it was during the first week of this Holy Fast, it is also the same during these days. On Great Monday, on Tuesday and on Wednesday it is necessary to fast. And the Sixth Great Council ordered the faithful to fulfill the saving passion days in fasting and prayer and tenderness of heart. The Fast ends during the Midnight Service of Great Saturday".

_.) According to the witness of St. Chrysostom, taking priority for Christians, who persistently burn with the desire to be with the Lord in last days of His life, praying is intensified and the usual ascetic effort of the fast is increased during Passion Week. They individually according to the love for fallen humanity, imitating the Lord, who suffered unexampled suffering, try to be good and indulgent to our infirm brethren and to do more deeds of love and mercy. Considering the indecent judgment uttered during the days of our justifying the most pure blood of the Undefined Lamb, they stopped all law suits, legal proceedings in offices, disputes and punishments and even released those prisoners not guilty of criminal offences from the chains of prison during this time.

_.) In this way the reading of all the Gospels increased the length of the services, that in the Moscow Dormition Cathedral since the middle of the 17th century their reading began from the 6th Week of the Great Fast. Although in 1661 the imperial decree prohibited the reading of the Gospel during the Week of the Palms, this decree was not always carried out. During the confluence of the feast of the Annunciation with the first days of Passion Week, the reading of some of the gospels was also transferred to the Week of the Palms (See Perm Eparchialjniiia Vedomosti (Perm Diocesan News) 1889, 7). There are witnesses that in the 16th century the reading of the Four Gospels began with 6th week. In the Obikhodnik of the Siya Monastery about reading the Four Gospels in the 6th week there is this note: "but on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of this week two Gospels will be

read, and during Passion week also two: Luke and John" (A. Dmitrievsky, *Bogoslužhenie v Russkoi Tserkvi v 16 veke* (Worship in the Russian Church in the 16th Century), Part 1, page 205). According to the present Typicon (Ustav), all Four Gospels should be read during the first three days of Passion Week. Although at the present time in many places the reading of the gospels in the 6th week of the fast is also supposed. However except for an emergency such practice is undesirable. But, in carrying out the requirement of the Typicon (Ustav) concerning the reading of the Four Gospels during the first 3 days of Passion Week, it does not follow that they be read quickly and indistinctly. It is better to read through one Gospel, but with full reverence and attention. In that case it is better to read the Gospel of John because it serves as the best introduction to the story of the condemnation and sufferings of the Savior read during the last days of Passion Week (Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1887, 24; 1888, 37).

The reading of the Four Gospels in the Hours during the first three days of Passion Week in Russian is improper according to item 35 of the *Ust. Dukh. Kons.* (Rubrics of the Spiritual Consistory): "the worship service should be done according to the church Typicon (Ustav)... concerning the reading and singing..., without any changes or innovations" (Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1892, 14).

_) In the Constantinople churches during Passion Week the entire iconostas, all the wooden cases (kivot), lamp-stands, candle holders, chandeliers and the bishop's throne are covered with black material so that nothing gold or shiny is visible anywhere.

*S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp 531-534.
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