

Saturday Before Pentecost

On the Saturday before Pentecost we *commemorate* all departed pious Christians, with the idea that the occasion of the coming of the Holy Spirit not only consists of the economy of the salvation of man, but that the departed also participate in this salvation. Therefore, the Holy Church, sending up prayers on Pentecost for the enlivening of all the living through the Holy Spirit, petitions for the grace of the Holy Spirit also for the departed, which they were granted while they were still living, and was the source of eternal blessedness, because "all souls are enlivened through the Holy Spirit".

The Holy Church appeals to us, "Let all of us pray to Christ, today as we remember the dead of all ages": "Your servants who rest in Your courtyard, and in the bosom of Abraham, from Adam even until today who have chastely served You, fathers and our brothers, friends, together with relatives", "forefathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers, from the first and even up to the last", "every age, the old, and young babies, and children", and "the new born babies", "every rank and generation", "kings, priests, bishops, monks and novices", "husbands together with wives", "those departed at sea, or on land, or in the rivers, wells, or lakes, or in the trenches", "in the mountains, on travel", "in the deserts, or in the cities", and "any place", "in vain pursuits, cut in half by lightning, both from deathly abomination, and any wound", "dying from Divine foreboding, all mortal thunder sent down from Heaven, the cracking of the earth, the rising storms of the sea", "to be carried away by hailstones, snow and increased clouds, or killed by a brick, or covered over with earth", "unexpected death of the pious, and from every stream of fallen trees, iron, or rocks", "was food for an animal, either birds, or reptiles", "who died from poisonous bites by the enwrapping of snakes, from being trampled by horses, from strangling and hanging by the simple-hearted", "who was killed by drinking drugs, poisons, choked on bones", "those whom you have allowed, O Lord, to die from a sudden unexpected fall", "all who repose, O Lord, piously repose", "Our Savior, deliver all the faithful departed from the ever burning fire and the never ending darkness, the gnashing of teeth, and the unending torment of worms, and every torture", "Arise on the last day with glory", "grant me Your heavenly kingdom" _).

Epistle: Acts 28:1-31; sel. 51. **Gospel:** John 21:15-25; sel. 67. For the departed **Epistle:** 1 Col. 4:13-17; sel. 270. **Gospel:** John 5:24-30; sel. 16.

At the **liturgy** on this Saturday after the exclamation: "Save, O God, Thy people", one sings: "We have seen the true Light", another sings: "Thou only Creator with wisdom profound" (Troparion for the departed), and the third sings nothing. In the opinion of the "Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) (1889, 10), there is no basis in the given case to drop the hymn "We have seen the true Light", even though it is included in the number of stichera of Pentecost which have not yet been appointed. In fact, the Paschal hymns:

"In the tomb with the body" and "Shine, shine", are said by the priest unfailingly in the liturgies of Lent and in both liturgies of St. Basil the Great during Holy Week.

If a **temple feast commemoration** falls on this Saturday, it is transferred to Thursday of the Seventh week (Typicon Ch. 54. On the Temple). If a **Saint with Polyeleos** falls on this Saturday, the service to him (see Ustav (Typicon) for May 25) is transferred to *the same* Thursday *_*). About the **order of services** for this Saturday see above on page 493 (Meat Fare Saturday).

_) In earlier times in large cities like Moscow, there was a custom to perform a ceremony of burial for all who died an unhappy death on Thursday of the seventh week after Pascha. For this purpose beyond the city special places were allocated, called poor houses, for the pitiful, for the disturbed, for those rotting away, or simply for potters, for example the "potter's field" in Jerusalem for the burial of strangers. On the Poor Houses sheds with one large grave were built. Here the bodies of those who died violently or suddenly and consequently did not receive the prayers and sacraments of the Church before death were taken. Here were buried the bodies of those executed, drowned, burned, frozen, murdered, strangers, beggars and in general any one who did not belong to any parish and consequently did not find a place in one of the parish cemeteries. In 1619, Patriarch Philaret ordered also to bury those "who died from drunkenness, or was murdered, or from hanging, or drowning, or poisoning oneself, or died from any foolish action initiated by oneself in the Poor House".

The last Patriarch Adrian has modified this rule of Philaret a little: "suicides and those killed in a robbery or burglary are not to be put in the cemeteries of the Poor Houses, but to be buried in the forest, or in a field without commemoration on the Semik" (i.e. on the Thursday of the seventh week after Pascha). He punished the priest's church wardens. "If the robber and thief at death will be confessed and communed with the Holy Mysteries then put them without the burial service in the city Poor House, where such robbers and thieves are put". Since the reign of Peter 1, corpses of the dissected were taken from the hospital to the Poor House. Many of the unburied departed were in such a way gathered in the common open grave on the Poor House. A guard station in which the "God's home" existed stood by the shed for their protection. (These guard stations, by the way, were also educational houses where illegitimate babies were brought and where the "God's home" kept them because of welfare). Under its protection the body lay until the Thursday of the seventh week after Pascha, i.e. until the Semik, or until the feast of the Protection of the Mother of God. Only on these two days of the year all those committed to the earth were also taken to the Poor House, as Maxim the Greek explains: "Burials for the drowned and killed are the corrupted fruit chilled by the icy cold of the earth". In Moscow there were some Poor Houses: at the church of St. John the Warrior, in Bozhedomka, the Hierarch Nicholas Poor House, in Zvonariakh, the Piatnitsa Poor House, the Dormition of the Mother of God in Mogiljtsakh, at the Protection Monastery

in the Poor Houses, and others. Here on Semik (and on the feast of the Protection of the Theotokos) there was a cross procession from the cathedrals and monasteries for the serving of the general Panikhida. Crowds of innumerable pious people and the poor followed in the cross procession. Their whole trip was a desire to turn the internment of the departed, who was deprived in his time and taken to the common grave of the Poor House into a Christian burial. Their burial and commemoration on the personal account of the pilgrims, the philanthropists, was the immemorial custom of the Russian Semik. After the burial followed the general Panikhida, for which the souls of servants "who died from unknown death, Thou Only, O Lord, knows their names". Following the Panikhida well-wishers distributed generous alms to the gathered needy in memory of the buried. This pious custom of the Semik came to an end. Then in the following days, especially in late autumn and severe winter, again they gathered the lonely and unknown corpses on the Moscow waste grounds, and brought them to the Poor House up to following Semik. This custom stopped with the destruction of the Poor Houses at the end of the past century, after the Moscow plague, when in the cities special cemeteries were started and it was forbidden to bury at the parish churches. Up to now the custom in some cities was kept only to gather on the Semik in one of the city cemeteries, and there, above the graves of the buried, to serve a Panikhida for all, who have come to an unhappy death and remained unknown at burial. Such a Panikhida on the Semik is served, for example, in Smolensk in the cemetery of the Sts. Peter and Paul Parish.

The Council of the 100 Chapters witnesses to the character of the commemoration of the departed on Saturday on the eve of Trinity day in ancient Russia. At that time the commemoration was only pagan: men and women gathered at the cemeteries, cried over the graves "with loud cries", and simultaneously with the cries, the buffoons, "fiddlers, male and female", began to play, and the crying was soon replaced by skipping and dancing, and those who were cheered up started to clap their hands and to sing "satanic songs" (ref. Page 589 2 examples).

In antiquity even all the seventh week after Pascha was for our forebears a time for various sorts of games and entertainment. The warm spring time, having been deprived of greens and flowers, gave abundant material for all kinds of amusement, and this week was called "green" or the "green holidays". Fortune telling was usually an accessory to this week as well as of a winter holiday. Also at the present time in different places of Russia, this week is accompanied by special festivals and ceremonies which according to its structure and character represent a mixture of extreme contrasts, fun and crying, Christianity and paganism, and as such should be uprooted.

_) Because of the concurrence on May 15, 1893 of the Solemn day of the Sacred Coronation of Their Imperial Majesties with the Saturday of the 7th Week after Pascha, by instruction of the Holy Synod, the church service for this Saturday of the 7th Week according to the Flowery Triodion was transferred to Thursday of the same week.