

# Rector's Letter, April, 2017

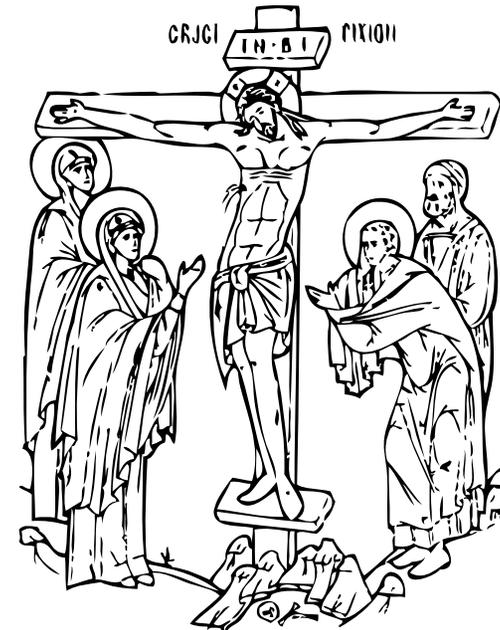
Dear brothers and sisters:

On the evening of Sunday, April 9, we mark the beginning of Holy Week, remembering and sharing in our Lord's journey to the Cross and the Tomb before his resurrection. You can find the schedule of services included in the calendar, and on a separate flyer. It's worth thinking through the significance of the different days and services:

**Great and Holy Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday** are dedicated to the Bridegroom: "Behold the Bridegroom comes at midnight, and blessed is the servant whom he shall find watching...." The Bridegroom Matins services are held on the evening *before* each of these days, and serve to focus our attention on what is to come, reminding us that we need to watch and pray every day of our life, because we do not know the day or the hour when we will meet the Lord.

**Great and Holy Thursday** is devoted to the Mystical Supper. "Mystical" has nothing to do with New Age or magic. "Mystical" literally means "hidden"—so we are celebrating the hidden reality behind the Supper which the Lord celebrated with his disciples before his betrayal, and also the reality behind the Supper that we share in the Divine Liturgy. We can only see bread and wine, but our Lord tells us, "This is my

Body broken for you..." Matins of Holy Thursday is observed on *Wednesday evening*, and we celebrate Vespers and Liturgy on Thursday morning. At this Liturgy, not only do we remember how our Lord first told us to "do this in remembrance of me," but also we consecrate and prepare the Reserved Sacrament, which is kept in the Tabernacle on the Altar throughout the year, to distribute to the ill and shut-ins who cannot come to church.



**Great and Holy Friday** begins the Three-Day Passion. On Thursday evening, we celebrate Matins with twelve Gospel readings, taking us from the Last Supper to the garden where our Lord spent the night in suffering prayer, from his betrayal to his unjust trial to his

crucifixion and death. It is solemn, awe-inspiring, and the absolute center of our faith. It is also long and demanding on soul and body—be prepared! The next morning we have Royal Hours of Holy Friday, a time for quiet reflection on the Lord's crucifixion. It is much simpler than Matins, but also beautiful. Especially if a long evening service is a challenge for you, consider making Royal Hours a focal point in your week.

With Vespers on Holy Friday, we make a transition to the Tomb of our Lord. By now, the Tomb is set in the middle of the church and decorated with flowers. The Shroud of the Lord is brought out for veneration at this service.



**Great and Holy Saturday** is devoted to the mystery at the heart of our salvation: the day our Lord lay dead in the Tomb. It seemed an utter defeat, but actually it was the moment of everlasting victory: our Lord descended into Hades, the realm of the dead, broke down its gates and brought out all its prisoners. When the Lord seemed most helpless, he was actually most active. So with Matins on Friday evening, we hear words mixing sorrow and joy. The entirety of Psalm 118/119 is chanted (the same one quoted at the funeral service: “Blessed are you, O Lord, teach me your statutes!”), interspersed with hymns meditating on the meaning of the Cross, the Tomb, and the Resurrection. We also carry the Shroud in procession around the Church, like in a funeral procession.

Vespers and Liturgy of Holy Saturday quietly marks the first celebration of the Resurrection. We hear readings from the Old Testament, all showing how it was necessary for our Lord to suffer and die, to rise again on the third day. At the end of them, we change all the dark coverings and vestments to our brightest white and hear the first Gospel reading of the Resurrection, with the command from our Lord: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:18).

We still await the full day of **Pascha** to begin! We gather again before the Tomb in almost complete darkness Saturday night, and hear some of the same hymns from Matins of Holy Saturday. At their end, the Shroud is taken up and placed on the Altar, where it remains in honor until the Paschal Season ends.

Then all candles are put out, and a fresh light is lit while the priest begins the hymn, “Your Resurrection, O Christ our Savior, the angels in heaven sing. Enable us on earth to glorify you in purity of heart!” After three times, the Royal Doors open, everyone’s candle is lit from that original flame, and we go out in procession, singing the same hymn.



After three times around the church, we stop at the doors to hear a Gospel account of the Resurrection and exchange the Paschal Greeting: “Christ is risen!” “Indeed, he is risen!” When we re-enter the church, all is filled with light, the Tomb is put away, and we pull out all the stops for the Paschal Vigil. Eventually, we come to the Paschal Homily of St. John Chrysostom, which sums up our joy and hope before we celebrate the Liturgy. After the Liturgy, we bless the baskets we have brought, full of festive food and drink, and then we enjoy our paschal breakfast, sometimes called an “Agape Meal,” literally, “Love Feast.”

Pascha is far too big a feast to fit into just one night, so we pry our eyelids open and gather again for Paschal Vespers at noon on Sunday, which is short and sweet and bubbling with joy. The joy overflows into **Bright Week**, which we observe with Divine Liturgy on Bright Monday. We hear some of the same hymns from the Paschal Vigil, but we also have a special procession, stopping at the four sides of the church to hear four Gospel accounts of the Resurrection.

We could go on: Thomas Sunday, the Myrrh-bearing Women, the Ascension, Pentecost.... But this is plenty for one month. Come and see!

With love in Christ,  
Fr. John S. Modrow

## Around the Parish

The **Presanctified Liturgy** is celebrated every Wednesday during Great Lent, and each week we have had a different set of hosts for the suppers that follow. Thanks to all our hosts thus far. **The last supper on April 5 is open to the whole parish as “pot-luck.”**

Please remember that every member of this parish has a responsibility to participate in **Holy Confession — at least once during Great Lent**. In addition to the regularly scheduled time for Confession following Saturday Vespers, Confessions are also heard every Wednesday, 4:30–5:45 PM. Please do not let the days slip away. If the scheduled times cannot work, then please make an appointment with Fr. Joshua.

**Our parish hosted Mission Vespers for the CT Deanery** on March 26. Thanks go to everyone who prepared to welcome our guests, both for the service and the repast that followed.

Saturday, April 1, is our **parish clean-up** day in preparation for Holy Week and Pascha. We plan to start by 9 AM. All are welcome to help beautify the church inside and out.

In preparation for Palm Sunday, we have planned a **palm-tying workshop** on Monday, April 3, at 5:30 PM. We had a great turn-out last year, enabling us to finish the project quickly: come and join us!

After the Divine Liturgy on **Lazarus Saturday**, April 8, everyone is welcome downstairs for a **pancake breakfast**. We will be assembling and **distributing Easter baskets** for our neighbors in need afterwards.

**Holy Week begins on April 10**, and leads to the Three-Day Passion: Holy Friday, Holy Saturday, and Pascha, the Day of Resurrection. You can find all the services for this week through Bright Monday in the flyer enclosed with this newsletter.



There is an ancient tradition to **keep vigil at the Tomb of Christ from the evening of Holy Friday until the Paschal Vigil** begins the following night. We returned to this practice last year and plan to continue it. We are looking for pairs to sign up for periods of the night and day when we don't have services. **Please consider this opportunity to keep prayerful watch** as we remember our long-suffering Lord's great love.

Our customary day for the **Blessing of Graves** is Thomas Sunday, April 23, with a rain date of Sunday, April 30.