

# Rector's Letter, April–May, 2021

Dear brothers and sisters:

We are in a difficult place in our lives, where we see so much reason for hope and freedom, but also so much uncertainty about the time and circumstance when we can enjoy them. I have been holding back this newsletter for weeks, until our plans were firm and clear for Holy Week, Pascha and Bright Week. Only now, as April and Lent come to an end, are we ready to share that news!

The news for our parish is largely good. We have established a solid safety regime that carried us through the worst of COVID without incident. Meanwhile, we have received the blessing of our bishop, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon, to celebrate in the temple as many services as practical, starting with Palm Sunday. So we have worked out a schedule for Holy Week with at least one service every day—you can find the flyer with those details enclosed.

We will still experience challenges and limitations and perhaps even disappointments, but we have come a long way since a year ago. Come and see!

Some of us still are unable to come, though, due to illness and infirmity. We have been live-streaming our Divine Liturgy via Facebook and Youtube. Now we will be doing the same for oth-

er services in the temple. There is no substitute for standing in the temple ourselves, to be able to partake of the sacraments along with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Still, we are glad to be able to provide this opportunity to reach out to those who are absent and to welcome others who might just be exploring Orthodoxy for the first time. Know also that every member of our church is prayed for by name at each Divine Liturgy.

This time last year, I wrote: “On Pascha this year, wherever we may be, we still rejoice: Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!” Our circumstances have changed, but the eternal truth remains: Christ is risen!

Yours in Christ,



## Around the Parish

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon has issued a directive that our diocese celebrate in the temple as many services as practical, starting with Palm Sunday. **So from Palm Sunday on, unless specific exceptions are announced, all services will be held in the temple, but shared via livestream.**

**Our services in the temple are streamed via Facebook and Youtube.** You can most easily find them on our website: <https://sspeterpaul.org/media> .

In addition to the enclosed Holy Week flyer, you can **learn more about upcoming services** on our website: <https://sspeterpaul.org/praying> .

While we will not be able to have an Agape Meal (aka Paschal Breakfast) this year in the early hours of Pascha, we have worked out **three opportunities to bless Pascha baskets**: after the Holy Saturday Liturgy at 10 AM, after the midnight Paschal Liturgy, and after Paschal Vespers on Sunday at noon. Bring your basket with you to church, and keep it beside you. We will bless them in their places.

Our customary day for the **Blessing of Graves** at SS. Peter & Paul Cemetery is St. Thomas Sunday, May 9, with a rain date of Sunday, May 16. If you would like to bless a grave at another cemetery during this Paschal season, please speak with Fr. Joshua to arrange a time.

We have **Children's Sessions on Palm Sunday, April 25, and May 16**. Both of these use our Zoom meeting details, which can be found on our website: <https://sspeterpaul.org/praying> .

We will not have a children's egg hunt this year, but we will have **packaged gift bags for children following Paschal Vespers on May 2**.

**Many years to Elias Mosher**, who completed his Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science and has enlisted as a Nodal Network Specialist in the National Guard. He will leave for basic training on May 18, and then go on to more specialized training before returning at the end of February.

## PREPARING FOR HOLY WEEK & PASCHA

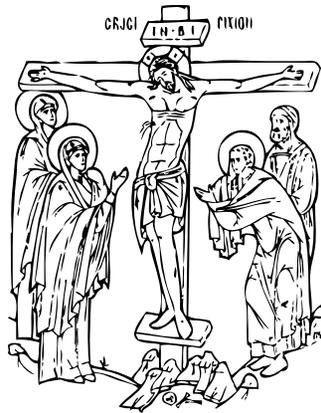
**Great and Holy Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday** are dedicated to the Bridegroom: "Behold the Bridegroom comes at midnight, and blessed is the servant whom he shall find watching..." The Bridegroom Matins services are held on the evening *before* each of these days, and serve to focus our attention 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.

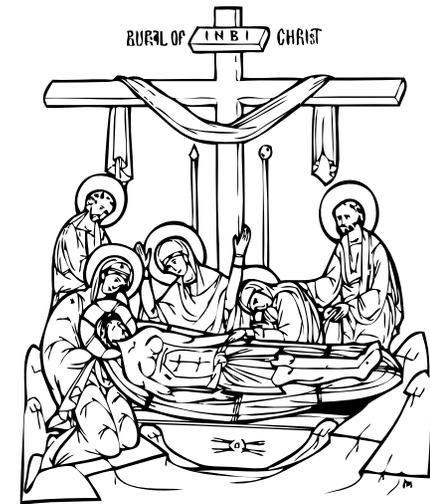
**Great and Holy Friday** begins the Three-Day Passion. On Thursday evening, we celebrate Matins with twelve Gospel readings, taking us from the Last Supper to the garden where our Lord spent the night in suffering prayer, from his betrayal to his unjust trial to his crucifixion and death. It is solemn, awe-inspiring, and the absolute center of our faith. It is also long and demanding on soul and body—be prepared!

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.

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!