

Holy Saturday Vespers

H APOKAQHLWSIS

(TAKING DOWN FROM THE CROSS)

The priest makes again three low bows before the holy Table. After kissing the holy Gospel book, he says:

DEACON: Bless Master,

PRIEST: Blessed is our God always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

PEOPLE: Amen.

O come, let us worship and fall down before God our King. *(low bow)*

O come, let us worship and fall down before Christ, our King and our God. *(low bow)*

O come, let us worship and fall down before Christ himself, our King and our God. *(low bow)*

Psalm 104 (103)

Bless the Lord, O my soul!

O Lord my God, thou art very great.

Thou art clothed with honor and majesty,
robed in light as with a garment.

Thou stretchest out the heavens like a tent,
thou coverest thine upper chambers with waters,
thou makest the clouds thy chariot,
thou ridest on the wings of the wind,
thou makest thine angels spirits,
and thine ministers a flaming fire.

Thou setest the earth on its foundation,
so that it shall never be shaken.
Thou coverest it with the deep as with a garment,
the waters rise above the mountains.
At thy rebuke they flee,
At the voice of thy thunder they hasten away.
They rise up to the mountains,
they run down to the valleys,
to the place which thou hast established for them.
Thou setest a boundary that they may not pass over,
so that they may not return and cover the earth.

Thou makest springs gush forth in the valleys,
the waters run down between the mountains.
They give drink to all the beasts of the field,
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.
By them the birds of the sky have their home,
they sing among the rocks.
Thou dost water the mountains from thy upper chambers.
The earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works.
Thou makest the grass grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
and wine to cheer the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart.
The trees of the plain are satisfied,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted,
there the birds build their nests;
on the highest branches the stork has its home,
the high mountains are for the wild goats,
the rocks are a refuge for the coney.

Thou hast made the moon to mark the seasons,
the sun knows its time for setting.

Thou hast made darkness and it was night,
in it all the wild beasts of the forest roam around.
The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
As the sun rises, they come together
and lie down in their dens,
people go out to their work,
and to their labor until the evening.

O Lord, how manifold are thy works!
In wisdom thou hast made them all:
The earth is full of thy creatures.

Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living beings small and great.
There go the ships,
and the dragon thou hast made to play in it.

These all look to thee,
to give them their food in due season;
when thou givest to them,
they gather it up.
When thou openest thy hand,
they are filled with good things.
When thou turnest away thy face,
they are dismayed;
and when thou takest away their breath,
they die and return to their dust.
When thou sendest forth thy breath,
they are created,
and thou renewest the face of the earth.

Let the glory of the Lord endure forever;
the Lord will rejoice in his works-

who looks on the earth, and makes it tremble;
who touchest the mountains and they smoke.
I will sing to the Lord all my life;
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.
May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I will rejoice in the Lord.
Let sinners disappear from the earth,
and the wicked exist no more!
Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Praise the Lord!

The sun knows its time for setting.
Thou hast made darkness and it was night,
O Lord, how great are thy works!
In wisdom thou hast made them all.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, glory to thee, O God. *(low bow)*

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, glory to thee, O God. *(low bow)*

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, glory to thee, O God. *(low bow)*

O our God and our hope, glory to thee

During the preceding Psalm, the priest stands before the Altar and quietly says the seven lamp-lighting prayers:

1.

O Lord, compassionate and merciful, long-suffering and rich in mercy, give ear to our prayer, and attend to the voice of our supplication. Show us a sign of thy favor;¹ lead us in thy way, so that we may walk in thy truth. Gladden our hearts, so that we may fear thy holy name, for thou art great, and

¹(Ps.86<85>:17).

thou workest wonders.² Thou alone art God, and there is none like thee among the gods, O Lord.³ Thou art mighty in mercy, and benevolent in strength, to aid and to comfort and to save all those who put their trust in thy holy name. For to thee belongs all glory, honor and worship: to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen.

2.

O Lord, do not rebuke us in thine anger, or discipline us in thy wrath,⁴ but deal with us in all thy kindness,⁵ O physician and healer of our souls. Bring us to thy desired haven.⁶ Enlighten the eyes of our hearts to the knowledge of thy truth.⁷ And grant us that the completion of this day, and our whole life may be peaceful and sinless, through the intercessions of the holy Theotokos and of all the saints. For thine is the majesty, and the power, and the glory, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen.

3.

O Lord, our God, remember us sinners, thy worthless servants, when we call upon thy holy name; and let us not be put to shame in our hope⁸ of thy mercy; but grant us, Lord, all our petitions which are for our salvation. And make us worthy to love and fear thee with all our hearts, and to do thy will in all things. For thou art a good and loving God, and unto thee we give glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen.

4.

O Lord, who art hymned by the holy angelic powers with never-silent hymns and incessant praises, fill our mouths with songs of praise, so that we may ascribe majesty to thy holy name.⁹ Grant us a share and an inheritance with those who fear thee in truth, and who keep thy commandments,

²(Ps 77<76>:14).

³(Ps. 86<85>:8).

⁴(Ps 38<37>:1).

⁵(Ba. 2:27).

⁶(Ps. 107<106>:30).

⁷(1 Tim 2:50).

⁸(Ps. 119<118>:116).

⁹

(Si 39:15).

through the intercessions of the holy Theotokos and of all the saints. For to thee belongs all glory, honor and worship: to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen.

5.

O Lord, our God, thou upholdest all things by thy pure and perfect hand, thou art patient with us all and mournest over our wickedness: remember thy compassions and thy mercy. Visit us with thy goodness; and grant us to complete the present day, avoiding the diverse plots of the evil one; and preserve our lives free from attack, through the grace of thine all-holy Spirit. Through the mercy and love toward mankind of thine only-begotten Son, with whom thou art blessed, together with thine all-holy and good and life-giving Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen.

6.

O great and wonderful God, with thine inexpressible wisdom, and thine abundant providence thou administerest all things. Thou hast bestowed on us good things on earth; thou hast given us a pledge of the promised kingdom through the good things already bestowed on us; and thou hast made us to flee from all evil during that part of this day which is past: Grant us also to complete this day without blame before thy holy glory, and to glorify thee, our God, who art the only good One, and lover of mankind. For thou art our God, and unto thee we give glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen.

7.

O great and most high God, thou alone hast immortality and dwellest in unapproachable light.¹⁰ Thou hast made all creation in wisdom. Thou hast separated the light from the darkness.¹¹ Thou hast made the sun to rule the day, the moon and the stars to rule the night.¹² Thou hast made us sinners at this present hour worthy to come before thy face with thanksgiving and to offer to thee our evening praises. Thou thyself, O Lord, lover of mankind, direct our prayer as incense before thee,¹³ and accept it as a fragrant offering.¹⁴ Grant us to pass the present evening and the coming night in peace. Clothe us with the armor of light.¹⁵ Deliver us from the terror of the night and from the pestilence that stalks in the darkness.¹⁶ Grant us

¹⁰(1 Tim.6:16).

¹¹(Gen.1:4).

¹²(Gen.1:16).

¹³(Ps.141<140>:2).

¹⁴(Phil. 4:18).

¹⁵(Rom.13:12).

sleep, which thou hast appointed for the alleviation of our weakness, free from every imagination of the devil. Yea, O Master of all, bestower of good things, may we, being moved toward repentance on our beds, remember thy name in the night, that, illuminated by meditation on thy commandments,¹⁷ we may rise up in joyfulness of soul to glorify thy goodness, offering up prayers, and supplications to thy tender love for our sins and for those of all thy people, whom thou visitest in mercy, through the intercessions of the holy Theotokos. For thou art a good God and lovest mankind, and unto thee we give glory, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages, Amen.

When the priest has completed the preceding prayers, and the people have finished the Psalm, the great Litany is prayed.

The Litany of Peace

DEACON: In peace let us pray to the Lord.

CHOIR: Lord, have mercy.

DEACON: For the peace from above, and for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord.

CHOIR: Lord, have mercy.

DEACON: For the peace of the whole world; for the good estate of the holy churches of God, and for the union of all men, let us pray to the Lord.

CHOIR: Lord, have mercy.

DEACON: For this holy House, and for those who with faith, reverence, and fear of God enter therein, let us pray to the Lord.

CHOIR: Lord, have mercy.

DEACON: For our Father and Metropolitan PHILIP, for the venerable priesthood, the diaconate in Christ, for all the clergy and the people, let us pray to the Lord.

CHOIR: Lord, have mercy.

DEACON: For the President of the United States and all civil authorities, and for our armed forces everywhere, let us pray to the Lord.

¹⁶(Ps. 91<90>:5-6).

¹⁷(Ps. 119<118>:143).

CHOIR: Lord, have mercy.

DEACON: For this city, and for every city and land, and for the faithful who dwell therein, let us pray to the Lord.

CHOIR: Lord, have mercy.

DEACON: For healthful seasons, for abundance of the fruits of the earth, and for peaceful times, let us pray to the Lord.

CHOIR: Lord, have mercy.

DEACON: For travelers by sea, by land, and by air; for the sick and the suffering; for captives and their salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

CHOIR: Lord, have mercy.

DEACON: For our deliverance from all tribulation, wrath, danger, and necessity, let us pray to the Lord.

CHOIR: Lord, have mercy.

DEACON: Help us; save us; have mercy on us; and keep us, O God, by thy grace.

CHOIR: Lord, have mercy.

DEACON: Calling to remembrance our all-holy, immaculate, most blessed and glorious Lady Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, with all the Saints, let us commend ourselves and each other, and all our life unto Christ our God.

CHOIR: To thee, O Lord.

PRIEST: For unto thee are due all glory, honor, and worship: to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

CHOIR: Amen.

When the people begin the singing of the second verse of Psalm 140 (141), the priest/deacon performs the great censing.

***Psalm 141 (140)
in the First Tone***

CHOIR: O Lord, I have cried unto thee, hear thou me. Hear thou me, O Lord. O Lord, I have cried unto thee, hear thou me: give ear to the voice of my supplication, when I cry unto thee. Hear thou me, O Lord.

Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. Hear thou me, O Lord.

- Set a watch, O Lord, on my mouth, and a guard on the door of my lips.
- Incline not my heart to evil words, to make excuses for sins.
- With men who work iniquity; I will not associate with what they choose.
- The righteous will correct and reprove me with mercy, but let not the oil of the wicked anoint my head.
- For my prayer will be even in the midst of their pleasures. Their judges have been overthrown off the sides of the rocks.
- Then they shall hear my words for they are pleasant. Like a lump of clay shattered on the ground, so shall their bones be strewn at the mouth of Hades.
- But my eyes are turned toward thee, O God, my Lord. In thee I have hoped, take not away my soul.
- Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me, and from the snares of evildoers.
- The wicked shall fall into their own nets, while I alone escape.

Psalm 142 (141)

- With my voice, I cried to the Lord;
with my voice, I made supplication to the Lord.
- I pour out my prayer before him;
I declare my trouble before him.
- When my spirit is faint, thou knowest my way.
- In the path where I walk, they have hidden a trap for me.
- I looked on my right hand and watched, but there was no one who takes notice of me;
- There is no refuge for me; no one cares for me.
- I cried to thee O Lord; I said: thou art my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.

- Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low.
- Save me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I.
- Bring my soul out of prison, so that I may give thanks to thy name.
- The righteous will wait for me until thou recompense me.

Psalm 130 (129)

- Out of the depths I have cried to thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice!
- Let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication.
- If thou, O Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, Lord, who can stand? But there is forgiveness with thee.
- Because of thy name, I have waited for thee, O Lord; my soul has waited for thy word; my soul has hoped in the Lord.

Tone One

Beholding thee, O Christ, hanging on the Cross, the whole creation was changed by fear. The sun's light failed and the foundation of the earth was shaken. All things suffered with the Creator of all things. O Lord, thou hast endured this willingly, glory to thee.

From the morning watch until night, from the morning watch, let Israel hope in the Lord!

Tone Two

Why do the impious and lawless people plot in vain?¹⁸ Why have they condemned to death the Life of all? Great wonder! The Creator of the world is delivered into the hands of the transgressors of the law, and the lover of mankind is lifted up on the Cross so that he may set the prisoners in Hades free, who cry: O long-suffering Lord, glory to thee.

For with the Lord there is mercy and with him is abundant redemption, and he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Today the most pure Virgin saw thee hanging on the Cross, O Word; and with a mother's love she wept and her heart was pierced bitterly. Groaning from the depth of her soul, she struck her face and tore her hair in her grief. And as she beat her breast, she cried lamenting:

¹⁸(Psalm 2:1).

Woe is me, my divine Child! Woe is me, thou art the Light of the world! Why dost thou vanish from my sight, O Lamb of God? Then, the hosts of angels were seized with trembling, and they said: O incomprehensible Lord, glory to thee.

Praise the Lord, all you nations! Laud him, all you peoples!

O Christ the Creator and God of all, when thy Virgin Mother saw thee hanging on the Cross, bitterly she cried: O my Son, where is the beauty of thy form? I cannot bear to see thee crucified unjustly. Make haste, then, to arise, so that I too may see thy Resurrection from the dead on the third day.

For great is his mercy toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

Tone Six

Today the Master of Creation stands before Pilate; today the Creator of all things is given up to the Cross, and by his own will he is like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.¹⁹ He who sent manna in the wilderness is transfixed with nails; his side is pierced, and a sponge with vinegar touches his lips. The Deliverer of the world is struck on the face, and the Creator of all is mocked by his own servants. How great is the Master's love for mankind! For those who crucified him, he prayed to his Father saying: Forgive them this sin, for in their wickedness they do not know what they are doing.²⁰ Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,

See, how the lawless synagogue has condemned to death the King of the Creation! They were not ashamed when he recalled his blessings saying: O my people, what have I done to you?²¹ alone? Have I not healed every disease and every sickness?²² How then have you repaid me? Why have you forgotten me? In return for healing, you have given me blows; in return for life, you are putting me to death. You hang upon the Cross your Benefactor as an evildoer, your Lawgiver as a transgressor of the Law, the King of all as one condemned. O forbearing Lord, glory to thee.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages, Amen.

¹⁹(Is. 53:6).

²⁰(Luke 23:34).

²¹(Mic. 6:3).

²²(Matt. 9:35).

Same Tone

An awesome and marvelous mystery we see today. The invisible is seized; the One who delivers of Adam from the curse is bound. The examiner of human hearts and inner thoughts is unjustly tried. The One who sealed the abyss is shut in prison. The One before whom the powers of heaven stand with trembling stands before Pilate; the Creator is struck by the hand of his creature. The judge of the living and the dead is condemned to be crucified; the Destroyer of Hades is enclosed in a tomb. O long-suffering Lord, thou didst endure all these things in thy tender love and didst save all mankind from the curse, glory to thee.

The Entrance The Prayer of the Entrance

DEACON: Let us pray to the Lord.

PEOPLE: Lord, have mercy.

PRIEST: In the evening and in the morning and at noonday we praise thee; we bless thee; we give thanks to thee; and we implore thee: O Lord, Master of all, lover of mankind, direct our prayer as incense before thee;²³ and do not incline our hearts to words or thoughts of evil; but deliver us from all who seek after our souls.²⁴ For our eyes are turned toward thee, O Lord,²⁵ and in thee we have put our hope, O our God, for to thee belong all glory, honor and worship: to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

PEOPLE: Amen.

DEACON: Father, bless the holy entrance.

PRIEST: Blessed is the entrance of thy holy ones,²⁶ always: now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

²³(Ps.141<140>:2).

²⁴(Ps.59<58>:3).

²⁵(Ps.141<140>:8).

²⁶An alternative reading is “Blessed is the entrance into thy sanctuary.”

PEOPLE: Amen.

The priest/deacon lifts up the Gospel.

DEACON: Wisdom! Let us attend!

***The Prayer of Thanksgiving
(By the Martyr Athenogenes)***

PEOPLE: O gladsome light of the holy glory of the immortal, heavenly, holy, blessed Father, O Jesus Christ! Now that we have come to the setting of the sun and behold the light of evening, we praise God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For meet it is that at all times thou shouldest be magnified by pleasant melody, O Son of God, who bestowest life. Therefore, the world glorifies thee.

DEACON: The evening prokeimenon.

***The Vesperal Prokeimenon
The Prokimenon (Psalm 21):
Tone Four***

READER: They divided my clothes among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. *(Twice)*

My God, my God, hear me; why hast thou forsaken me?²⁷

They divided my clothes among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

The Prophecies

READER: The reading from the book of Exodus.

Exodus 33:11-23

DEACON: Wisdom! Let us attend!

READER: The Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. And while he would return to the camp, his young assistant Joshua the son of Nun did not depart from the tent. Then Moses said to the Lord, "See, thou sayest to me, 'Bring up this people.' But you have not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found grace in my sight.' Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way, so that I may know thee and that I may find grace in thy sight.

²⁷(Psalm 22<21>:18).

And consider that this nation is thy people.” And he said, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” Then he said to him, “If thy Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. For how then will it be known that thy people and I have found grace in thy sight, unless thou goest with us? So we will be distinct, thy people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth.”

So the Lord said to Moses, “I will also do this thing that you have asked; for you have found grace in my sight, and I know you by name.” And he said, “Please, show me thy glory.” Then he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” But he said, “You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.” And the Lord said, “Here is a place by me, and you shall stand on the rock. “So it will be, while my glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and will cover you with my hand while I pass by. Then I will take away my hand, and you will see my back; but my face will not be seen.”

Prokeimenon (Psalm 35<34>):

Tone Four

READER: Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me. They rewarded me evil for good.

READER: The reading from the Book of Job.

Job 42:12-17

DEACON: Wisdom! Let us attend!

READER: Now the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters. And he named the first Day, the second Casia, and the third Amalthaea’s Horn. In all the land were found no women so beautiful as the daughters of Job; and their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. 6} After this affection Job lived one hundred and seventy years, and all the years he lived were two hundred and forty: and Job saw his children and grandchildren for four generations. So Job died, old and full of days. It is written that he will rise with those whom will God raise up. This man is described in Syriac Bible, as living in the Land of Ausis, on the borders of Idumea and Arabia. His name was Jobab; and having taken an Arabian wife, to beget a son named Ennon. And he himself was the son of his father Zareh, one of the children of Esau, and of his mother, Bosorrah. Thus, he was the fifth son of Abraham.

READER: O Lord, our Lord, how wonderful is thy name in all the earth! For thy majesty has been exalted above the heavens.

The reading from the Prophecy of Isaiah.

Isaiah 52:13-54:1.

DEACON: Wisdom! Let us attend!

READER: This is what the Lord says: “See my servant will deal prudently; he will be exalted and extolled and be very high. Just as many were astonished at thee, so his visage was marred beyond human semblance, and his form more than the children of mortals; so he will startle many nations. Kings will shut their mouths at him; for what had not been told them they will see, and what they had not heard they will consider. Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He will grow up before him as a tender plant and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected by others, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we held him no account. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him and by his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. And by a perversion of justice he was taken away. And who will declare his generation? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of my people he was stricken. And they made his grave with the wicked; but with the rich at his death, because he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief. When thou makest his soul an offering for sin, he will see his offspring, he will prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord will prosper in his hand. He will see the labor of his soul, and be satisfied. By his knowledge my righteous servant will make many righteous, for he will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot him a portion with the great and he will divide the spoil with the strong because he poured out his soul to death, he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors. Sing, O barren one, who has not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou who hast not labored with child! For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman.”

*The Epistle
Prokeimenon (Psalm 88<87>):*

DEACON: Let us attend.

READER: They have put me in the depths of the pit: in dark places and in the shadow of death. O Lord, God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee.

DEACON: Wisdom!

READER: The reading from Saint Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 1:18-2:2

DEACON: Let us attend!

READER: Brethren, the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will reduce to nothing." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the proclamation preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Consider your calling, brethren, not many of you were wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble. But God has chosen what is foolish in the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong; and what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no flesh should boast in his presence. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption; that, as it is written, "let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

And I, brethren, I did not come to you proclaiming the testimony of God with excellence of speech or of wisdom. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

PRIEST: Peace be to you who has read.

PEOPLE: Alleluia. *(Three times)*

Tone Five

READER: Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my soul.

They also gave me gall for my food and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see.²⁸

The Gospel

DEACON: Wisdom. Attend, let us hear the Holy Gospel.

²⁸(Psalm 69<68>:2,22,24).

The priest blesses the people saying:

PRIEST: Peace be to all.

PEOPLE: And to thy spirit.

DEACON: The reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew.

PEOPLE: Glory to thee, O Lord, glory to thee.

DEACON: Let us attend.

***Matthew 27:1-37; Luke 23:39-43; Matthew 27:39-54;
John 19:31-37; Matthew 27:55-64***

At that time, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death and they bound him and led him away and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.

When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders saying, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money." So they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field to bury strangers in. Therefore, that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him who was valued, who was valued by the children of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You have said so." But when Jesus was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he made no answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you. But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge; so that the governor wondered greatly.

Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barab'bas. So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Barab'bas or Jesus who is called Christ?" For Pilate knew that they had delivered Jesus up out of envy. Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him,

“Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream.” Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the people to ask for Barab’bas and destroy Jesus. The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barab’bas.” Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let him be crucified.” And Pilate said, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified.” So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd saying, “I am innocent of this righteous man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” And all the people answered, “His blood will be on us and on our children!” Then Pilate released for them Barab’bas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the praetorium, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him saying, “Rejoice, King of the Jews” And they spat upon him and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

As they went out, they came upon a man, of Cyrene, Simon by name; this man they compelled to carry Jesus’ cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull), they offered him wine to drink, mingled with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots, that what was spoken by the prophet might be fulfilled: “They parted my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. And over his head they put the charge against him which read, “This is Jesus the King of the Jews.” Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

Luke 23:39-43

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him saying, “If you are the Christ, save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise. “

Matthew 27:39-54

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself: If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. If he is the King of Israel, let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, la’ma sabach-tha’ni?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And some of the bystanders hearing it said, “This man is calling

Elijah.” And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.

And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and gave up the spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him keeping watch over Jesus saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this is the Son of God!”

John 19:31-37

Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other which had been crucified with him: But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness--his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth--that you also may believe. For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, “Not a bone of him shall be broken.” And again another scripture says, “They shall look on him whom the have pierced.”

Matthew 27:55-61

There were also many women there, looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee ministering to him, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zeb’edee.

At this point the Body of the Lord is taken down from the Tree. The priest lowers the body from the Cross, wraps it in a clean linen cloth, and places it on the Holy Altar.

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathe’a, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the sepulcher.

PEOPLE: Glory to thee, O Lord, glory to thee.

The Litany of Fervent Supplication

DEACON: Let us say with all our soul and with all our mind, let us say:

PEOPLE: Lord, have mercy. *(One time)*

DEACON: O Lord Almighty, God of our fathers: we pray thee, hearken, and have mercy.

PEOPLE: Lord, have mercy. *(One time)*

DEACON: Have mercy on us, O God, according to thy great goodness: we pray thee, hearken, and have mercy.

PEOPLE: Lord, have mercy. *(Three times)*

DEACON: Again we pray for all pious and Orthodox Christians.

PEOPLE: Lord, have mercy. *(Three times)*

DEACON: Again we pray for our Father and Metropolitan PHILIP for presbyters, deacons, and all monastics; and for all our brethren in Christ.

PEOPLE: Lord, have mercy. *(Three times)*

DEACON: Again we pray for mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, and visitation, and forgiveness and remission of the sins of the servants of God: *(Names) (Here prayer may be offered for the people with special needs)*; and for all devout Orthodox Christians who live and dwell in this community.

PEOPLE: Lord, have mercy. *(Three times)*

DEACON: Again we pray for the blessed and ever-memorable founders of this holy house, and for all our fathers and brethren, the Orthodox fallen asleep before us, (Names) (Here prayer may be offered for the departed people) who here and throughout the world lie asleep in the Lord.

PEOPLE: Lord, have mercy. *(Three times)*

DEACON: Again we pray for those who bring offerings and do good works in this holy and venerable church; for those who serve and those who sing; and for all the people here present who await thy great and rich mercy.

PEOPLE: Lord, have mercy. *(Three times)*

PRIEST: For thou art a merciful God and lovest mankind, and unto thee we give glory, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

PEOPLE: Amen.

Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this evening without sin.

Blessed art thou, O Lord, God of our fathers! Praised and glorified is thy name forever, Amen.

Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, even as we have set our hope in thee.

Blessed art thou, O Lord, teach me thy statutes.²⁹

Blessed art thou, O Master, make me to understand thy statutes.

Blessed art thou, O holy One; enlighten me with thy statutes.

Thy mercy, O Lord, endures forever.³⁰ O despise not the works of thy hands.³¹

To thee belongs praise, to thee belongs honor,³² to thee belongeth glory, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen.

The Litany of Supplication

DEACON: Let us complete our evening prayer unto the Lord.

PEOPLE: Lord, have mercy.

DEACON: Help us; save us; have mercy on us; and keep us, O God, by thy grace.

PEOPLE: Lord, have mercy.

DEACON: That the whole evening may be perfect, holy, peaceful and sinless, let us ask of the Lord.

PEOPLE: Grant this, O Lord.

DEACON: An angel of peace, a faithful guide, a guardian of our souls and bodies, let us ask of the Lord.

²⁹(Ps. 118<119>:12,64,135).

³⁰(Ps.107<106>:1).

³¹(Ps.138<137>8).

³²(Ps.65<64>:1).

PEOPLE: Grant this, O Lord.

DEACON: Pardon and forgiveness of our sins and transgressions, let us ask of the Lord.

PEOPLE: Grant this, O Lord.

DEACON: All things good and profitable for our souls and peace for the world, let us ask of the Lord.

PEOPLE: Grant this, O Lord.

DEACON: That we may complete the remaining time of our life in peace and repentance, let us ask of the Lord.

PEOPLE: Grant this, O Lord.

DEACON: A Christian ending to our life, painless, blameless, peaceful and a good defense before the awesome judgment seat of Christ, let us ask.

PEOPLE: Grant this, O Lord.

DEACON: Calling to remembrance our all-holy, immaculate, most blessed and glorious Lady Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, with all the Saints, let us commend ourselves and each other, and all our life unto Christ our God.

PEOPLE: To thee, O Lord.

PRIEST: For thou art a good God and lovest mankind, and unto thee we give glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

PEOPLE: Amen.

PRIEST: Peace be to all.

PEOPLE: And to thy spirit.

DEACON: Let us bow our heads to the Lord.

PEOPLE: To thee, O Lord.

The Prayer at the Bowing of Heads

PRIEST: O Lord our God, who bowed the heavens and came down for the salvation of mankind: Look favorably upon thy servants and thine inheritance, for to thee, the awesome Judge and lover of mankind, have thy servants bowed their heads, and bent their necks, not expecting help from men, but hoping in thy mercy, and looking for thy salvation. Protect them at all times, especially in the present evening, and in the coming night, from every enemy, from every adverse work of the devil, from vain thoughts and from evil imaginations.

PRIEST: Blessed and glorified is the might of thy kingdom: of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

PEOPLE: Amen.

*The Aposticha*³³ *Tone Two*

CHOIR: O Christ, Life of all, Joseph of Arimathea took thee down dead from the Cross, and he wrapped thee in a fine linen cloth with ointment. Profoundly moved in heart and speech, he enshrouded thy most pure body, while himself enshrouded in awe, yet he cried out unto thee rejoicing: 'Glory to thy self-abasement, O lover of mankind.

The Lord is King, he is robed in majesty. He has clothed and girded himself with might.³⁴

O Redeemer of all, when thou wast laid for us all in a new tomb, the scornful Hades, seeing thee, trembled with fear. Its bars were broken, its gates were shattered, the tombs were opened and the dead rose. Then Adam, rejoicing with thanksgiving, cried out unto thee: Glory to thy self-abasement, O lover of mankind.

He has established the world, it shall never be moved.³⁵

³³The PROCESSION OF THE EPITAPHION takes place during the singing of the Aposticha in the following manner:

- The priest censes the Epitaphion, which has been placed on the Holy Altar Table, nine times, reverences it and kisses it.
- Preceded by Altar Boys carrying the processional cross, candles, and incense, the Priest carries the Epitaphion around the Church, as in the Great Entrance of the Divine Liturgy, holding it above his head.
- When they reach the Bier, which should be placed in the middle of the Solea, decorated with flowers, he walks around it three times.
- The Priest places the Epitaphion on the Bier, censes it nine times and sprinkles it with rose water.
- He places the Gospel over the Epitaphion, makes three prostrations, kisses it, and returns to the Sanctuary.

³⁴(Psalm 93<92>:1)

In the flesh thou wast enclosed willingly within a tomb, yet in thy divine nature thou remained uncircumscried and boundless. Thou hast shut up the chambers of Hades, O Christ, and emptied all its palaces. Thou hast accounted this Sabbath worthy of thy divine blessing and the glory and of thy radiance.

Holiness befits thy house, O Lord, forevermore.³⁶

O Christ, when the powers of heaven saw thee falsely accused as a deceiver by the transgressors of the Law and saw the stone before thy tomb sealed by the hands which had pierced thy most pure side, they were filled with fear at thine inexpressible forbearance. Yet, rejoicing at our salvation, they cried out unto thee: Glory to thy self-abasement, O lover of mankind.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, Now and ever and unto ages of ages, Amen.

Tone Five

He who is wrapped in light as with a garment was taken down from the Cross by Joseph and Nicodemus. Seeing thee dead, stripped, and unburied, Joseph lamented with grief and tender compassion saying: “Woe is me, my sweetest Jesus! A little while ago the sun seeing thee hanging on the Cross wrapped itself in darkness: the earth shook with fear and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. And now I see thee for my sake submitting thyself willingly to death. How shall I bury thee, my God? How shall I wrap thee with a linen cloth? How shall I touch thy most pure body with my hands? What hymns shall I sing to thee at thy departure, O compassionate Savior? I magnify thy sufferings; I sing the praises of thy burial and thy Resurrection crying: O Lord, glory to thee.”

*Saint Simeon's Prayer*³⁷

PEOPLE: Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for my eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to enlighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel.

PEOPLE: Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.

³⁵(Ps.93<92>:1).

³⁶(Ps. 93<92>:5).

³⁷(Lk.2:29-32)

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

All-Holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, cleanse us from our sins. Master, pardon our iniquities. Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities for thy name's sake.

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily³⁸ bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.³⁹

PRIEST: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

PEOPLE: Amen.

(People sing the Troparia)

Tone Two

PEOPLE: Noble Joseph, taking down thy pure body from the tree, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth with spices, and buried it, laying it in a new tomb⁴⁰.

Glory, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

³⁸Or, "living".

³⁹Or the evil one.

⁴⁰(John 19:40-41).

The angel stood by the tomb and cried aloud to the ointment-bearing women: Myrrh is proper for the dead, but Christ has shown himself a stranger to corruption.

Then the priest concludes the office of vespers with the dismissal:

The Dismissal

DEACON: Wisdom!

PEOPLE: Father, bless.

PRIEST: Blessed is HE WHO IS, Christ our God, always now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

PEOPLE: Amen. Preserve, O God, the holy Orthodox Faith, and all Orthodox Christians, now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen.

PRIEST: O most holy Theotokos, save us!

PEOPLE: More honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim, thou who without corruption⁴¹, gavest birth to God the Word and art truly Theotokos, we magnify thee.

PRIEST: Glory to thee, O Christ, our God and our hope, glory to thee.

PEOPLE: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Father, bless.

PRIEST: May Christ our true God, who endured spittings, scourgings, beatings, crucifixion and death for our salvation, through the intercessions of his all-immaculate and all-blameless holy Mother; by the might of the precious and life-giving cross; by the protection of the honorable bodiless powers of heaven; at the supplication of the honorable, glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John; of the holy, glorious and all-laudable apostles; of the holy, glorious and right-victorious martyrs; of our venerable and God-bearing Fathers; of the holy and righteous ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna; of Saint (*N*) patron Saint of this Church; of Saint(s) *N.N.*, whose memory we celebrate; and of all the saints: have mercy upon us, and save us, forasmuch as he is good and loves mankind.

Then facing the icon of Christ, the priest says:

PRIEST: Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy upon us and save us.

⁴¹Or remaining virgin...etc.,

PEOPLE: Amen.