

RESURRECTION BANQUET: THE LORD WANTS YOU TO STAY by Fr. Dan

Imagine going to a wedding, attending until the priest puts the crowns on the bride and the groom, then leaving for home in a hurry! Imagine 70% of the people invited for the wedding doing that? Thus, in the middle of the service, before the fullness of its joy, before the opportunity for greetings offered by the reception, the majority of the wedding party turns its back on the bride and the groom, leaving them with their immediate wedding party and family. That would be considered inappropriate if not rude, would it not?

And the wedding is more than 2 hours, for sure! And the ones we honor are certainly very important, but they can't compare with Jesus the Bridegroom.

Yet, sadly, that is exactly what happens in too many of our churches! The holiest of nights, the celebration of the greatest joy man has ever experienced, and many Orthodox Christians leave a quarter or half way through! No problem staying late on New Years Eve to celebrate a worldly event! But it's too late and too long on Resurrection night!

Brothers and Sisters, I beg you to think carefully of how the Lord, His mother and the Saints feel as we abandon them in the middle of the celebration! Can we afford to behave so inappropriately, to be rude., with our Savior? **Can we afford to pass down such a rude tradition to our children?**

With all due respect, I would like to remind you that such "tradition" hurts you and all of us! **This can be the year when such an awful "tradition" can be abandoned!** It could be that your effort to do so would translate in the most meaningful climax of your fasting! Please, please, don't leave! Please, please stay with us, with the Risen Lord, with Mary and the Saints and let us rejoice for "this is the day that the Lord has made", **this is mystical rehearsal of His Second Coming! Let us not leave now, so we won't get in the bad habit and be left behind then!**

It is a heavenly banquet, **let us dress up for it!** The Early Christians would dress in white for the Resurrection! Many of them would actually wear the white "robe of immortality" they were given at their Baptism! Thus, Resurrection night and its services became a *REVIEW* of their new birth and renewal at their Baptism!

Most of us were baptized as infants so our "robes of immortality" won't fit. But, let us **try and dress at least in light colors, reminding ourselves of our newness of life in Christ** made possible by the Resurrection.

There is nothing more exciting for a child than to experience the Resurrection night! I still remember the thrill I experienced when I was one! The yearly expectation of that thrill, I came to understand later, was an anticipation of the fullness of the thrill when the Lord will come and we will meet him!

Parents, prepare your children for it and bring them to the service! Brothers and sisters, let us be patient with our children! Even the practice of that patience is important, for **we will not leave them behind when the Lord will come, nor will they be perfectly silent as He does!**

Let us all remember that the Church is "the Lord's neighborhood!" Like Mr. Rogers and his warm smile, our Lord wants our children to be with Him "in His neighborhood" where the "magic" of love, joy, peace and kindness never end!

Receiving Holy Communion with proper preparation is strongly urged by the Scriptures! It is the "Antidote of immortality"! Jesus took the "death-virus" of our human nature in Adam and Eve and transformed it into a "death-killer." Holy Communion immunizes us to death! Thus, receiving it on Resurrection night is extremely important!

May the Good Lord open your heart and mind for the true participation in that awesome night!

I (Hades) received a body and came upon God. It received earth and met up with heaven. It received what it saw and stumbled upon what it did not see. Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?

- **C**hrist is risen, and you are overthrown.
- **C**hrist is risen, and the demons are fallen.
- **C**hrist is risen, and the angels rejoice.
- **C**hrist is risen, and life rules.
- **C**hrist is risen, and not one is to be found dead in the tomb.

For Christ rising from the dead has become the First to awaken among those who are asleep.

To Him be the glory and the power to the ages of ages. Amen.

(excerpt from The Resurrection Sermon of Saint John Chrysostom)

HOLY WEEK: OUR BROTHER IS DYING

All of us have experienced at one time or another the sorrow of having someone in our family suffer and die...; especially, when it was someone very close, like husband or wife, children, mom or dad, brother or sister, **the world came to a stand still for a period of time right before their death;** I still remember the last week of my dad's life here... ' I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat, I couldn't think of anyone or anything else...' all I did was spend time right beside his bed trying to comfort him, and praying a lot...

Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, has become our **adoptive brother!** Unless we are His adoptive brothers, we are not part of His Body, the Church! Through my Baptism, I was united with Him, and I became His brother!

Holy Week is the solemn week during which **Jesus, our adoptive brother, suffers and dies for us!** If we really believe in Him, and if we really love Him, we should act the same way we do when our loved ones according to the flesh suffer and die...

It is precisely because **we are His family, and His passion and death are mystically taking place, that the Church is right besides Him, night after night, day after day, in worship!** For the true Christian, life comes to a standstill during Holy Week. Other than work, everything should be set aside, for Someone whom we dearly love is dying! When we focus on what really happens, **we can't wait to go to church,** we can't think of much else, we are less preoccupied with the needs of the body...; we want to be right there besides Him, praying and meditating on what it all means for us!

What will you do during Holy Week? Will you join the Church. His family?

His Passion and death do not change, nor do the rituals which mystically expand them to us today! The spiritual drama lived by those around Him then, continues today, because the events of His life have been given an eternal dimension, unlike ours which are temporary! In the Orthodox Church, **to remember an event of Christ's life is to enter its eternal now!**

Palm Sunday, Monday and Tuesday evening, we will celebrate The Bridegroom Services. Jesus is the Bridegroom; the Church, of which you and I are a real part, is the Bride! During these services, we anticipate **the Mystical wedding,** the union of the Bridegroom to His Bride! Unlike our worldly concept of marriage, the union between Christ and His Church **begins with the ultimate sacrifice of the Bridegroom for His Bride!** He, the true King, shows the true love for the Queen! These are nights of anticipation, and nights of Thanksgiving! **He loved me so much that He was willing to die for me!**



Anointing at Bethany

Tuesday evening we also remember the woman who anointed His feet at Bethany, thus also anticipating His burial, which included an anointing in the Jewish tradition. Her quiet testimony, her sacrifice of the expensive ointment reminds us that we are to humbly and quietly offer Him the reassurance of our hearts and minds, the purity of our tears of joy for what He has done for us, as well as of sadness for our failure to respond to His love during the year which has just past! **Will you be there? Where else could you be? What could be more important?**



Kiss of Judas

On **Wednesday evening** we will perform the Mystery of the Holy Unction! The olive oil is the symbol of reconciliation with God! That reconciliation comes also from the Lord's sacrifice! The real healing is that of the soul, and it began through His suffering! His suffering is like an antidote for suffering! In His suffering, our suffering is given the proper dimension and purpose...; Wednesday we sadly remember Judas also... We remember his betrayal, his false kiss and their outcome. We grieve for his failure to remember God's blessing in the giving of His Son for us, and we grieve for our own imitation of Judas every time we sinned! **Will you be there? Where else could you be? What else could be more important?**

On **Thursday morning** we will join Him for that memorable Last Supper! We will hear those powerful words about how the bread and the wine will be consecrated from then on into His Body and Blood, to feed us, to draw us mystically into His saving Passion and His Resurrection! We will be gathered in His name and we will be gathered in His saving Passion and His Resurrection! We will be told that we are His family, that we belong to Him as well as unto one another! We will look at each other and examine whether we love each other as members of His family! **Where will you be that day! What else could be more important, unless**



you are working?

Thursday evening we will become witnesses of His arrest, His trail, His mocking and scourging, His painful road to Golgotha, His crucifixion and His death. We, His family, will read together all the passages about His passion. As we participate in His suffering, its reality is being rooted deeply in our minds and hearts. None of us knows whether this coming year, someone close to us, or we ourselves, might go through "the crucifixion" of suffering. The reality of His suffering, together with His promise to be with us always, will be very helpful when we needed! As we will watch our loved ones go through the "scourging of sickness", we will find strength in knowing that they are with the One who overcame the scourging! **Will you be there? Where else could you be? What could be more important?**



Scourging

On **Good Friday**, we should be in church three times, unless we work, or have honorable reasons not to be there. We will come back and focus on the events one more time! We



Crucifixion

will join John and the women, and **we will stand by the cross during the royal Hours**. They did not say or do much...; they were simply **there!** This simple service is designed to teach us that when we visit those who are suffering, we need not worry about what **we say** or what **we do**. Being with them, holding their hand, wiping their forehead, talking to God for them to hear, is more than anything we could say!

We will join Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, as they will take His body of the cross to put it in the tomb. **He really died, He was buried!** We are not talking legends...

A little later, we will do His funeral! Quite similar to ours! It is in that similarity, together with the joy of what followed His funeral (Resurrection) that we can come to funeral of those from among us during the following year and "not grieve like those who have no hope"...; **Will you be there? Where else could you be? What could be more important? Could you miss the funeral of your own brother?**

On **Holy Saturday morning**, we will come back for the unique Vespertine Liturgy filled with the Messianic prophecies. As we read the Old Testament prophecies about the Resurrection, we are reminded that **God is good at making plans, much better than we, so we might as well entrust ourselves into His hands!**

We hope that you will join us at the Lord's side through out the Holy Week! Let us experience the descent so that we can truly taste the ascent of the Resurrection!