

HOLY WEEK

Holy Week Meditation and Bible Study Guide

The services of Holy Week transform us into eyewitnesses and direct participants in the awesome events of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In readings taken from both Old and New Testaments, in hymns, processions, and liturgical commemoration, we see the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies and the mighty acts by God Himself. God, in the person of Jesus Christ, grants us forgiveness for our sins and rescues us from the pain of eternal death.

PALM SUNDAY EVENING - *Matthew 21:18-43*. This evening's service calls to mind the beginning of Jesus' suffering. The gospel describes the plotting of the priests and elders to trap Jesus into convicting Himself as a religious heretic. Through parables, Jesus tells us of His coming betrayal, trial, conviction and execution by crucifixion. The hymns of this service commemorate two things: first, the prophetic figure of Joseph, who while virtuous, nonetheless suffered unjustly at the hands of his brothers before being greatly rewarded, and the second, the parable of the fig tree, which in failing to bear fruit, became a symbol of the fallen creation and of our own lives, in which we also have failed to bear spiritual fruit.

HOLY MONDAY EVENING - *Matthew 22:15-46; 23:1-39*. This evening's theme is the need for watchfulness and preparation, lest we be called unprepared before the awesome judgment seat of Christ to render an account of ourselves. The gospel reading contrasts the efforts of the Pharisees to trick and discredit Jesus, with the forceful resistance which Christ mounts against their evil. The hymns remind us of the parable of the Ten Virgins, in which the faithful Christian is exhorted to vigilance.

HOLY TUESDAY EVENING - *John 12:17-50*. The need for true repentance is the concern of Tuesday evening's service. This transformation from the life of sin to a life of faith and obedience is exemplified for us in the person of the sinful woman who received the gift of forgiveness when she anointed Jesus with myrrh and washed His feet. The highlight of the service is the hymn written in honor of this woman by St. Kassiani. The Gospel meditation foretells of the coming suffering of Christ and recalls His inner struggles and agony.

HOLY WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON AND EVENING - Epistle readings: *James 5:10-16, Romans 15:1-7, I Corinthians 12:27-31-13:1-8, II Corinthians 1:8-11, Galatians 5:22-6:2, I Thessalonians 5:14-23*. Gospel readings: *Luke 10:25-37, Luke 19:1-10, Matthew 10:1 & 10:5-8, Matthew 8:14-23, Matthew 25:1-13, Matthew 15:21-28, and Matthew 9:9-13*. The primary theme of Holy Wednesday is our human need for healing and forgiveness, which come into our lives when we establish a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We are reminded that the way to this relationship is to be found, above all else, through a life of prayer. In the Sacrament of Holy Unction, the faithful are anointed and thus, healed both physically and spiritually. They are also reconciled to God and one another so that they might receive the gift of the Holy Eucharist instituted by Christ at the Last Supper.

HOLY THURSDAY MORNING - *Matthew 26:2-20, John 13:3-17, Matthew 26:21-39, Luke 22:43-45, and Matthew 26:40-27:2.* On Holy Thursday morning, we ascend Mt. Zion with Christ and the Twelve and enter into the upper room. Once there, we witness the awesome moment when, at the Last Supper, Christ abolishes the ritual practice of the Old Covenant and establishes the ritual of the New Covenant, prophesied by Jeremiah, through the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The faithful receive Holy Communion at that Holiest of Liturgies.

HOLY THURSDAY EVENING - In this service, we commemorate the undeserved suffering of Jesus Christ, endured for our sake, so that we might be reconciled anew to God our Father. The Gospel readings witness for us the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, his trial and conviction, and finally his torture, crucifixion, and death at the hands of a sinful humanity. This evening's service also includes the procession representing Christ carrying His own cross along the Via Dolorosa, and ends when we see before us the King of Glory crucified. The Gospels are as follows:

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| 1. John 13:31-18:1 | 7. Matthew 27:33-54 |
| 2. John 18:1-29 | 8. Mathew 23:32-49 |
| 3. Matthew 26:57-75 | 9. John 19:25-37 |
| 4. John 18:28-19:16 | 10. Mark 15:43-47 |
| 5. Matthew 27:3-32 | 11. John 19:38-42 |
| 6. Mark 15:16-32 | 12. Matthew 27:62-6 |

HOLY FRIDAY AFTERNOON - *1 Corinthians 1:18-2:2, Matthew 27:1-38, Luke 23:39-43, Matthew 27:39-54, John 19:31-37, and Matthew 27:55-61.* In this service, we are once again reverent witnesses to the undeserved suffering of Christ, to his terrible passion and death. What is especially remembered through liturgical commemoration and procession, is the faithfulness and love of Joseph of Arimathea, who tenderly removed Christ's body from the cross, wrapped it in clean linen and carried it to his own unused tomb for burial.

HOLY FRIDAY EVENING - *Ezekiel 37:1-14, 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, Galatians 3:13-14, Matthew 27:62-66.* On Good Friday evening, the theme is Christ's descent into Hades during which the Gospel of repentance and reconciliation with God is shared with those who died before Christ's saving dispensation in the flesh. The service begins with lamentations sung as we stand before the tomb of Christ commemorating His unjust punishment and the shedding of His innocent blood. But the service ends on a note of joy and hope, with the reading of the Prophet Ezekiel in which he describes his vision of our resurrection yet to come; in the midst of despair, we are told there is hope, for not even death can separate us from the unfailing love and power of God. Death is about to be conquered and faithfulness rewarded.

HOLY SATURDAY MORNING - *Romans 6:3-11, Matthew 28:1-20.* On Holy Saturday morning we celebrate the theme of faithfulness receiving its reward. The crucifixion is over, Christ is buried, the twelve apostles and other disciples are scattered and defeated. And yet, three myrrh-bearing women come in faithfulness to perform the last act of love--to anoint Jesus according to the Jewish burial custom. Their unwavering devotion is rewarded--they are the first to share in Christ's triumph over evil and death. They are the first witnesses to the Resurrection. This joy is commemorated through the scattering of bay leaves and rose petals by the priest.

HOLY SATURDAY EVENING - EASTER SUNDAY MORNING - *Mark 16:1-8.* The lamentations of the previous night are repeated, and the church is plunged into darkness to symbolize the despair and defeat experienced before the dawn of Christ's victory over the Enemy of our salvation. Precisely at

midnight, a single light emerges from the altar representing the victory of Christ over death, the defeat of the Prince of Darkness by Jesus, the Light of the World. As the light is passed from person to person, it pushes back the darkness of the church and defeats it completely. The Resurrection is proclaimed in song and triumphant procession, and after the Liturgy, its light is carried into our homes so that they too might be filled with its light, warmth and triumph.

EASTER SUNDAY MORNING - *John 20:19-25*. Christ's Resurrection and victory is affirmed in this morning's theme. The Gospel is read in several languages to illustrate the universality of the Good News of the Resurrection and its proclamation to the very ends of the earth. Love, forgiveness, reconciliation, triumph and joy--these are the gifts which we receive because Christ lived and died and triumphed for our sake.

GLORY BE TO HIM FOR ALL THINGS, AND MAY YOUR EASTER BE BLESSED

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