



# HOLY & GREAT WEEK IN THE DOMESTIC CHURCH *for Melkites*

*“Having fulfilled Forty Days... we ask to see the Holy Week of Thy Passion.”*

*- Vespers of Lazarus Saturday -*

“With these words sung at Vespers of Friday, Lent comes to its end and we enter into the annual commemoration of Christ’s suffering, death and Resurrection. It begins on the Saturday of Lazarus. The double feast of Lazarus’ resurrection and the Entrance of the Lord to Jerusalem (Palm Sunday) is described in liturgical texts as the “beginning of the Cross” and is to be understood therefore, within the context of the Holy Week. The common troparion of these days explicitly affirms that by raising Lazarus from the dead Christ confirmed the truth of general resurrection. It is highly significant that we are led into the darkness of the Cross by one of the twelve major feasts of the Church. Light and joy shine not only at the end of Holy Week but also at its beginning; they illumine darkness itself, reveal its ultimate meaning.

All those familiar with Orthodox worship know the peculiar, almost paradoxical character of Lazarus Saturday services. It is a Sunday service—that is, a Resurrection service—on a Saturday, a day usually devoted to the liturgical commemoration of the dead. And the joy which permeates these services stresses one central theme: the forthcoming victory of Christ over Hades. Hades is the Biblical term for Death in its universal power, for that unescapable darkness and destruction that swallows all life and poisons with its shadow the whole world. But now—with Lazarus’ resurrection—“death begins to tremble.” For there the decisive duel between Life and Death begins and it gives us the key to the entire liturgical mystery of Pascha. In the early church Lazarus Saturday was called “announcement of Pascha.” It announces and anticipates the wonderful light and peace of the next Saturday—the Great and Holy Saturday, the day of the Lifegiving Tomb.”

- from [Fr. Alexander Schmemmann’s “Liturgical Explanation of Holy Week”](#)

## INTRODUCTION

Holy Week and Pascha without being able to go to church??? We are here to help give you ideas and resources for Holy Week and Pascha for your domestic church (the church of your home), because the Resurrection isn’t cancelled! We need to remember now more than ever the hope we have in Christ’s destruction of death and His gift of eternal life. This current crisis is an opportunity to revive our domestic churches and begin to pray (or pray more) as a family/couple and individually. And, when we pray, we must remember that the whole Body of Christ—the Church, is with us.

When you can finally go back to church and celebrate the Holy Mysteries (the Sacraments) again and pray the Divine Services with your whole church family, don’t stop praying at home! We will give you some ideas for continuing your family and individual prayer.

You are especially encouraged to read [Fr. Alexander Schmemmann’s “Liturgical Explanation of Holy Week”](#) to prepare yourself for the spirit of each day of Holy & Great Week.

# SOME TIPS BEFORE WE BEGIN

## How do we pray from home?

Be sure to plan ahead! Make time in advance for your days to include prayer. Remember that it is better to pray a smaller amount with attention than rushing through to try to finish all the prayers. We don't want you to be overwhelmed or get discouraged! We have provided shortened versions of the Holy Week services for your use at home, and feel free to adapt them further for your needs. We have provided links for many of the hymns to help you sing them.

## How do we sing?

- The opening prayers and the psalms can be chanted antiphonally, meaning, back and forth between two groups of people. The two groups can be the leader and the rest of the family, or two halves of the family, divided between men and women, or some other way.
- Others portions of the services have hymns written out with music notes. If there is someone in your family who knows how to read music, that person can be the cantor and lead the singing. Some melodies are more difficult than others. The most important thing is to pray, so if the music is too hard and gets in the way, simply straight chant or recite it.

## What if we can't read music?

- That's ok, you can straight chant the hymns you don't already know by heart. To straight chant, just sing the hymn on one continuous note and end it in the same way as the psalm tone above.

## What if we can't sing at all or don't want to sing?

- That's ok too...you can just recite all the prayers! But remember that God isn't bothered by your bad singing! Singing helps to elevate our prayers beyond our daily conversations that are made in a normal speaking voice. Singing has always been an important element of liturgical prayer, even in the Jewish tradition, before Christ. So don't be afraid to stretch yourselves a little bit beyond your comfort zone!

## Where do we pray?

Do you have an icon corner set up somewhere in your home? If not, now is a perfect time to make one! Here are some tips:

- It doesn't have to literally be a corner of a room.
- On a table or shelf, set up at least one icon, preferably of Christ. If you don't have an icon, you can order one online (search "Purchase Byzantine Icon"). If you are unable to order one, [print one here](#).
- Other items to include: a Bible (you'll be putting it to use for the services!), a Cross, a candle to light when you pray, blessed items that you have taken home from special services at church, such as holy oil, and other icons or holy objects that help you to pray.



## How do we make a procession?

- The leader, or one of the children (to give them a fun and important job to do), leads the procession, and the others follow behind. If you can, based on your living situation and the weather, process around the outside of your house, once or three times. If this is not possible, process inside of your house. During your procession, sing, if possible, the text provided on that day for the procession. We will indicate which processions should be made while holding candles. Any kind of candles you have around your house are fine!

## Explanation of this guide

- The **red text** in each section below gives some information about each day. It is taken from the book “Year of Grace of Our Lord,” by “A Monk of the Eastern Church.” It can be read by the leader, or someone else, at the beginning of your time of prayer. The second part of this text is a help for parents in explaining the concept to young children. The bullet points offer some practical suggestions to celebrate that day as a family, with basic and more advanced suggestions. The **Resources** section includes links to texts and music appropriate for each day.

## What about watching a Liturgy online?

- Your pastor may be live streaming Liturgies for parishioners to participate in from home. Also, [LiveLiturgy.com](http://LiveLiturgy.com) is a website where you can find live Liturgies from many different parishes and monasteries. Watching a live Liturgy is a good addition to your family prayer, especially for keeping a connection with your parish and hearing homilies from your pastor (or another priest). But, we believe that the most important thing you can do as a family during Holy Week and Pascha is to actually pray together, rather than simply watching a video. When you do watch a video, try to pray along as best you can, in union with everyone else who is watching and praying.



## Definitions

**LEADER:** Preferably, the leader is the father of the family, who represents Christ. If this is not possible, the leader can be the oldest son, if he is old enough, or the mother, or someone else.

**TYPIKA:** A service that can be prayed in place of the Divine Liturgy when it is not possible to attend. [You can find the service here.](#)

**VESPERS:** Evening Prayer; the first service of a liturgical day, since the liturgical day begins in the evening of the previous calendar day (for example, Vespers for the weekly celebration of the Resurrection is on Saturday evening). [You can find an abbreviated Vespers service here.](#)

**ORTHROS/MATINS:** Morning Prayer. The evening services of Holy Week are celebrated in this context.

In addition to the other resources in this guide, it is especially recommended that you download and print [Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's "Liturgical Explanation of Holy Week"](#), keep it at hand and each day read the section for that day.

*Many thanks to the nuns of [Christ the Bridegroom Monastery](#) for their assistance in putting this resource together.*



# LAZARUS SATURDAY & PALM SUNDAY



“From the first day of Holy Week, we must ‘receive’ Jesus Christ, and accept that his will is sovereign over us. The meaning of Palm Sunday lies in this welcome given to the Christ who comes to us...The crowd which acclaimed Jesus carried palms and branches...probably olive branches...The palm stands for victory and the olive for peace and anointing. So let us go before Jesus and pay homage both to his power and to his tenderness, in offering our victories (which are in fact his victories) both over ourselves and over sin, and our inner peace (which is his peace)...The crowd shouted: ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord’. If I can say these words with complete sincerity and submission, if they mean that the impulse of my whole being goes towards the King whom, from henceforth, I acknowledge, then, in that instant, I have turned away from my sins and have received Jesus Christ. May He be welcomed and blessed, He who comes to me.”

**Parents:** Let your children know that these days are about acknowledging Jesus as King. Remind them that, according to St. Matthew, it was the children who cried, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” Encourage them to think about how they can be our example of welcoming Jesus, with the contagious excitement that children have. As you hand out your branches to them, remind them they are singing to Jesus as their King.

## BASIC:

- [Make a Palm Sunday procession](#): In your yard, do you have trees that are beginning to flower or sprout leaves? Or, do you have evergreen branches? If it’s possible to cut branches without damaging your tree, cut one branch for each member of the family. Make a procession using the prayers in the Palm Sunday for the Domestic Church document.
- At the conclusion of your procession, pray [Typika](#) while still holding your branches, or pray along with a livestreamed liturgy.
- Place your branches in a vase in your icon corner for the duration of Holy Week, as a reminder of your welcome to Jesus.
- Decorate candles that you will use throughout the week when you pray with flowers and other materials you have at home.
- Read the Gospel of the Raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-45) and listen to the beautiful hymn [Rejoice, O Bethany](#), reflecting on the tone this great mystery sets for Holy & Great Week. For insight into this connection read that section of [the Liturgical Explanation of Holy Week](#).

## ADVANCED:

- Pray [the Troparion of Lazarus Saturday & Palm Sunday](#) with your prayer before meals on both days.
- Pray Vespers or [the Bridegroom Service](#) on the next page on Palm Sunday evening to begin the transition into the sufferings of Christ.

## RESOURCES

[Palm Sunday Procession  
for the Domestic Church](#)

[The Great Doxology](#)

[The Troparion of Palm Sunday](#)

[Hosanna in Tone 5](#)

[Hosanna in Tone 3](#)

[Rejoice, O Bethany](#)





# THE BRIDEGROOM SERVICE

## GREAT & HOLY MONDAY, TUESDAY & WEDNESDAY

During these first three days, we reflect on Jesus as the “Bridegroom”—the Spouse of the Bride (the Church). He is coming to lay down His life for His Bride.

“Palm Sunday spoke to us of the coming of the King. Holy Monday announces the coming again of the Son of Man, at the end of time. But, whereas the entry of our King into Jerusalem – and his entry into our soul now, if we will but allow it – reveals humility and tenderness, the second coming, which the Church contemplates on Holy Monday, will be more like a sudden and violent catastrophe...Holy Tuesday continues to develop the theme of the coming of Christ and of the judgment he will exercise over men...[On Holy Monday], the accent was placed on the objective conditions of suddenness and terror that accompany the second coming. [On Holy Tuesday], the divine Revelation concentrates especially on the vigilance that the prospect of this judgment calls for from us, and on the inner preparation which is necessary...Holy Wednesday faces us with the contrast between two figures, two states of soul. It is devoted to the remembrance of two actions: the action of the woman who, at Bethany, came to pour a jar of precious ointment on Jesus’s head, and the action of the disciple who betrayed his Master. These two actions are not without a certain link, for the same disciple had protested against the apparent prodigality of the woman...The world will protest, as did the disciples at Bethany: to what purpose this prodigality, this waste?...Our heart is the first jar of ointment that we must break before him, for him.”

**Parents:** Explain to your children that we don’t know when Jesus will come again, or when our time will come to meet Him. Because of this, we have to use our time wisely, preparing for that day. As the woman at Bethany, we should give fully to the

Lord, without fear of cost. This is true of every part of our life, but most importantly of our heart. Encourage them to think of gifts they can give to Jesus, perhaps writing a letter to Him, or drawing or coloring a picture for Him, using their very best and very favorite paper, crayons, and decorations. Spare no cost!

### BASIC:

- Print [an icon of Christ the Bridegroom](#) and place it in your icon corner for these three days.
- Pray [the Troparion of the Bridegroom](#) each day. It’s a difficult melody, so feel free to straight chant or recite.
- After evening prayers, the leader of the family should make the sign of the cross on the forehead of each member of the family. If you have holy oil in the home from a church service that may be used.

### ADVANCED:

- Pray [the Bridegroom Service for the Domestic Church](#), or a portion of it, each day. Feel free to straight chant or recite them.
- Pray along with a live stream of a Presanctified Liturgy or a Bridegroom Service each evening.

## RESOURCES

[The Bridegroom Service for the Domestic Church](#)

[The Alleluia of the Bridegroom](#)

[The Troparion of the Bridegroom](#)

[I See Your Bridal Chamber](#)

[The Hymn of Kassiani](#)

# THE MYSTICAL SUPPER & BETRAYAL OF CHRIST



“Holy Thursday takes us into the mystery of the Passover...Three aspects of Holy Thursday are focused on here: the washing of the feet, the Lord’s supper, and Judas’s betrayal...Thou dost come near me, Lord, to wash my feet, and dost not allow me to protest against the exceeding humility which makes thee kneel before me to wash me...we must allow ourselves to be purified from our sins by him, from the dust of the daily road as well as from the greater impurities...I shall have part with the Christ who washes feet if I allow my feet to be washed by him and if I, myself, through his example, wash the feet of others...The central mystery of the upper room...lies in the Last Supper...it is particularly important to remember the link which our Lord wanted to establish between the meal in the upper room

and the Jewish Passover, and between this same meal and the Passion. Every Eucharist is a sacrificial meal. Each time that we make our communion with the body of Christ that has been broken and with his blood that has been shed, we are in communion with his Passion, and take part in his sacrifice. We ought to break and offer our own selves, our selfish desires, our will: we should plunge the knife of the sacrifice into our own hearts. Communion is a spiritual breaking...Holy Thursday also makes us contemplate the betrayal by Judas...Judas, with betrayal in his heart, accepts the sop that Jesus offers him, and we find his gesture odious. He has profaned the table of the Lord. But, how many times have we taken a place at this table without having purified our hearts sufficiently?...Judas betrayed his Master once... We constantly betray Jesus – in details. But it is no less a betrayal...The generosity revealed by Jesus in the Redemption dominates the horror of all betrayals.”

**Parents:** Teach your children the three important aspects of today: the washing of the feet, the Lord’s supper, and Judas’ betrayal. Explain that the washing of the feet is not only literal (though it did happen!) but is also a reminder to us to serve one another in love. Ask (or help) your children to think of a way that they can perform an act of love for someone else in the family today. Secondly, remind them that the Last Supper was not just another meal, but a time when Jesus revealed to His closest friends that He loved them deeply, and was going to give Himself completely for them, and for all of us. Lastly, make sure they know that, while it is good for us to see Judas’ betrayal as wrong, we need to also see in him a reminder that we, too betray Jesus.

## BASIC:

- In the morning, pray the prayer [“O Lord, I believe and profess that you are truly Christ,”](#) and pray silently for a moment in thanksgiving for the gift of the Eucharist.
- Pray [the Typika service](#), or pray along with a livestream of Vespers and the Divine Liturgy of the Mystical Supper.

## ADVANCED:

- After your evening prayers, “stay awake” with Jesus for an hour in silence near your icon corner. Just be with Him.

## RESOURCES

[The Troparion of Holy Thursday](#)

[O Lord I Believe and Profess](#)



# THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST

“He surrendered himself as a ransom to Death by which we were held captive, sold into slavery under sin” (Anaphora of St. Basil).

“On Holy Thursday we followed Jesus to the upper room. Today, Holy Friday, we follow him up to Golgotha. We will follow him, not as Peter followed him, from ‘afar off...to see the end’, but as his mother, as John and the holy women, who did not abandon him...

Holy Friday confronts us with Jesus Christ crucified for our salvation. In our encounter with the Cross of Jesus on Holy Friday, we can distinguish several essential moments or elements. There is first of all the objective mystery of the Redemption. The Cross is the instrument of our salvation, the instrument of Christ’s sacrifice. But in what way are we saved by the Cross?...We say that Jesus Christ died for us. But have we any kind of clear idea what these words ‘died for us’ mean?...Jesus Christ wanted, by means of his

voluntary death, to ‘make satisfaction’ superabundantly for all sins and to substitute a new life – his – for our irretrievably corrupted life...The ‘satisfaction’ that Jesus makes for my own sins is the most important event of my life. It is only through contrition or repentance that we can assimilate the mystery of this Redemption...Holy Friday will bear no fruit for us unless a violent upsurge of contrition throws us to Jesus’ feet. Is this Holy Friday to be a day of holy sorrow in my life?...Forgiveness is declared from the height of the Cross. Jesus says to the thief: ‘Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.’...On this Holy Friday, have I sought a word of forgiveness?...Finally, Jesus’s Cross must be placed at the centre of my life. The Cross of Jesus: not only an instrument of suffering, but an instrument of victory...The day when a man understands the ‘centrality’ of the Cross – of the radiant Cross as well as of the blood-stained Cross – is the great day of his life.”



**Parents:** Let your kids know that today is all about the Cross! Explain that it is through His death on the Cross that our sins are forgiven.

## BASIC:

- Remember that we follow a strict fast today: no meat, eggs, or dairy products.
- Place a cross in a prominent place in your home that everyone can pray before and venerate today. Perhaps you could also have each member of the family make (using paper, wood, or any other material you want!) a cross to hang/place in their bedrooms.
- Pray the [Crucifixion Service for the Domestic Church](#) given here. You are encouraged to pray at least the underlined Gospels. Afterwards, everyone should reverence the Cross.

## ADVANCED:

- Pray along with a livestreamed Crucifixion Service.
- Spend some time in silent prayer in the evening. You might want to pray the Jesus Prayer: **“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.”**

## RESOURCES

[The Crucifixion Service for the Domestic Church](#)

[Today is Hung Upon the Tree \(English\)](#)

[Today is Hung Upon the Tree \(Arabic\)](#)



# THE LAMENTATIONS AT THE TOMB OF CHRIST

“...the Church directs and concentrates our attention on our Lord’s tomb... this day shares both in the sorrow of the Passion and in the joy of the Resurrection...In the life of every disciple of Jesus, there come times when the Master seems to withdraw himself and to remain absent – as if in some way he is buried. These Galilean women show us what our attitude should be at such moments. They have observed the grave; they know where Jesus is. And we, too, must not doubt that Jesus is there, even if he does not seem to answer, even if he has become invisible: we must keep our eyes fixed, if not on him, at least in his direction. The women are not idle, they do not say: ‘Now nothing can be done.’



They prepare spices with which to anoint Jesus’s body. They continue to honour him, although life has withdrawn from his human body. In the same way, during the times when Jesus veils himself and is silent, let us not cease to keep him at the centre of our adoration. Let us prepare spices – the spices of our affections and works – to offer from now on to the Friend whom we do not see, and also to offer to him when once again we shall feel his presence – for we know he will come back to us...The peace of Holy Saturday is entirely oriented towards the great event of Sunday morning, towards the power and the joy of the Resurrection. But we have to safeguard this peace ‘which waits’...”

**Parents:** Explain to your children that today is a day of waiting. We all know how hard it is to wait for something exciting, and what is more exciting than the Resurrection!? But it is important for us to know that when time is spent waiting with Jesus, it is not wasted time. There are times in our life when Jesus feels far away. These are the times He asks us to wait with Him. As a family, think of things you can “do” in these times. Not “do” as distraction, but as a way to remember He is with us; for example, read Scripture, sing hymns from church, read saint stories, etc.

## BASIC:

- Remember that we follow a strict fast today: no meat, eggs, or dairy products.
- Print the [epitaphios \(burial shroud\)](#) and place it by your icon corner. You might use a box or a table as a “tomb” on which to lay the epitaphios, and decorate it with some nice cloth and flowers.
- Pray part of the [Lamentations Service for the Domestic Church](#) given here.
- Conclude the Lamentations Service with a candlelit procession, with the leader carrying the Epitaphios. After the Epitaphios is placed back on the tomb, everyone should venerate it with metanies and a kiss. Until the Resurrection, each time you come to your icon corner to pray, do the same thing.

## ADVANCED

- Pray along with a livestreamed Lamentations Service.
- Keep vigil for a little while by the tomb in silent prayer in the evening. You might want to pray the Jesus Prayer: **“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.”**

## RESOURCES

[The Lamentations Service for the Domestic Church](#)

[The Holy Friday Lamentations \(English\)](#)

[The Holy Friday Lamentations \(Arabic\)](#)