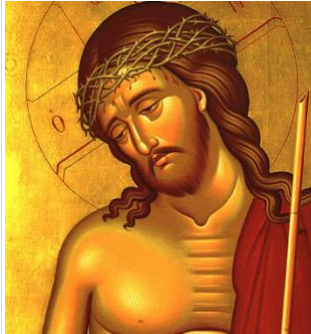




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Holy Monday

29 April 2024

On Great Monday we perform the commemoration of the virtuous Joseph (son of the patriarch Jacob and grandson of Abraham). Joseph is considered a type and foreshadowing of the Lord, because He too, the beloved Son of the Father, was slain by those of His fellow race, namely the Jews, sold by His disciple, tortured, and thrown dead into the dark tomb. Then He rose gloriously and nourishes us through the Bread of life, that is, through His all-holy Body.

Also on Great Monday we perform the commemoration of the barren fig tree, which was cursed by the Lord and dried up. This fig tree symbolizes the Synagogue of the Jews, which did not have spiritual fruits and for this reason was condemned by the Lord, just as are all people who lack spiritual fruit, namely virtue. The Church, bringing before us the example of the fig tree, wants to urge us towards spiritual struggles to acquire virtues.

The hymnography of this day is dedicated to the above two themes (Joseph and the fig tree) as well as the theme of the Lord coming towards His Passion. The first troparion chanted, as an introduction, is the most beautiful and most solemn "Behold, the Bridegroom Comes," inspired by the Lord's Parable of the Ten Virgins. Due to this troparion, which is chanted on the next two days, the Services of Great Monday, Great Tuesday and Great Wednesday are called the "Services of the Bridegroom."

Homily on Holy Week by Metropolitan Augustinos Kantiotes of Florina



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We have arrived, my beloved, at the saving Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, at Great Week. This week is called Great, because in its 168 hours from today until the night of the Resurrection, we give honor to great events, unique and world historic, which shocked the earth, the heavens, and that which is below the earth. This is why this week is called Great, and it is why it should not pass us by like all the others.

And I put forward the question: What are the duties of a Christian for Great Week? I am not addressing unbelievers, atheists or chiliasts; I am addressing believers who want to celebrate properly. What therefore are our duties during this week?

The first duty, my brethren, is to thank our Lord Jesus Christ from the bottom of our hearts. Of course, our whole life must be a thank you, a "Glory be to You, O Lord", for His small and great benefactions, the visible and the invisible, for all the good things, material and spiritual, that His grace abides in; the sun, air, water, flowers, beaches, all over the place. We should also thank Him for our parents and siblings, our spouse and children, for times and seasons, for what is blessed and necessary. An ungrateful person is worse than an animal. You have a dog, you throw him a piece of bread, and he wags his tail and says thank you. People also must be grateful to God. To thank Him for everything, but above all for the sacrifice of His Son, for His revered Passion. We would also like to thank Him for something else; for His long-suffering in so many of our crimes and blasphemies, for which the earth should open up to swallow us and the sea to swell to drown us, and yet it tolerates us. That is why on Great Friday the Church says, "Glory to Your long-suffering, O Lord, glory to You."

So one of our duties is to thank God. The other is to follow the sacred services. The services of Great Week are not like the others; they differ in many ways. The hymns are sweeter than honey, those inspired poems, such as the lamentations at the tomb, these exist in no other religion in the world. These hymns alone, which neither the Franks or the Protestants or anyone else possess, are enough to prove that our Church is not of this earth, but of heaven, inspired by God. Who did these? Where were they written? In schools and universities? They were done in caves by holy ascetics, as their tears fell to the ground and blossomed. They were not simply written with the mind and due to their education, but they were the blood of



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their hearts, of healthy feelings, an expression of life, of holy experiences, truths, which only those who truly love Christ can have. One must be unconscious so as not to be moved.

Our third duty is to fast. This week is a week of fasting, strict fasting. Don't listen to the materialists and the impious. We keep the fasts of our holy Church, and especially this fast, as a tradition of the apostles and fathers of Orthodoxy. When we talk about fasting, we do not simply mean the fasting of the stomach to remember the vinegar of the cross, but with the fasting of the stomach our mouths must also fast from bad-mouthing, our tongue from obscenity, our eyes from filthy spectacles. During these days in Byzantine times the emperors would sign a decree: Great Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Pascha Sunday the hippodromes and all the theaters were closed. The Church is in mourning. If we were a Christian nation, centers of corruption would have to be closed from Great Monday, for mourning to be established for the One who was raised up for us on the cross.

But we have another duty. It is the duty of Confession and Divine Communion. I will not expand on this, but will only say that during these holy days, and especially on the night of the Resurrection, we are called to stay in church till the end with our Resurrection candle. Whoever hears "Christ is Risen" and then leaves, it would be preferable if they had just stayed home. That which takes place, where the churches empty after "Christ is Risen", is a desecration, a contempt for Christ. Let us remain therefore until the end and prepare to receive Divine Communion. This week is especially a week for Divine Communion. What is Divine Communion? The Body and Blood of our Christ, fire from heaven. I ask, what are you? Are you straw? If so, then do not approach the holy things, otherwise you will burn. Are you gold? If you are gold, then gold is not threatened by the fire; the more it approaches the fire the more it is cleansed. So if you are a Christian, and remain unrepentant, the fire will burn you, just like it burned Judas who communed unworthily. But if you have gone through the furnace of sacred Confession, then approach; Divine Communion will be for you a medicine of immortality.



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During Great Week we also have a sacred duty to our brethren who are suffering and are in need. It is a week of love and mercy. Give a fine meal to someone who is hungry, a new piece of clothing - not old and used - to someone who doesn't have any, help a widow and an orphan, give some medicine to someone who needs it, visit someone who is sick, give a consoling word to someone that is sad, do whatever a heart of love thinks it can.

What I have said is nothing. There is something else which is more difficult. If you do everything we have said so far, and don't do this last thing, then you are not a Christian. What is it? I know Christians who are people of prayer, whose ears are drawn to sacred words, who fast strictly, who confess and commune, but few are the Christians who have - what? "Let us forgive all things with the Resurrection" (Doxastikon of the Praises, Pascha Sunday). Great Week is a week of forgiveness. Who, my brethren, in this life has no dislikes, coldness, contradictions, who does not have an enemy? During these holy days let us look up towards the Crucified One. No one was wronged or hurt like our Christ. While the nails ripped into His flesh, at the same time the curses and anathemas of the Pharisees ripped into His heart, yet He prayed on the cross, saying: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). Let us forgive one another therefore during these holy days; brides and mothers-in-law, brothers and sisters, friends with friends, children with parents, all without exception. Let us expand our hearts, let us feel the love of our Christ within us. How can we celebrate without love?

My brethren! Great Week equals a hand open to mercy, eyes with tears of repentance, feet that hasten to church, hearts reconciled, full of worship towards the Crucified One. Do we perform these duties?

Do you know who we are like? We are like a beggar who every day has fifteen cents thrown at him, but one day a certain king passes by him and says, "Open your pockets!" and begins to count 1, 2, 3,... 5,... 10,... 100,... 168 gold coins that dazzle his eyes. And he, instead of taking this treasure to use it, he goes to the river and throws the gold coins in the water. Isn't this insanity? These hours therefore that the Church gives us is a treasure. Every hour, every bell ring, every beat, every second, is an important hour.



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Let us take advantage of these holy days. Let us not allow them to escape from us like the rest of our lives. Do we know if we will live to celebrate another Great Week? Perhaps this Great Week is the last of our lives? How many people did we have with us last year? Where are they now? We are leaving, the train is whistling, only once do we go through life with this skin.

I pray this Great Week is an important milestone in our lives. May the Lord give us this week holy thoughts, holy feelings, heroic decisions, sanctification of the soul. May we seal Holy Week with the words, "Remember me, Lord, when You come into Your kingdom" (Lk. 23:42).