

BEHOLD THE BRIDEGROOM – THE GREAT WEDDING FEAST

GREAT MONDAY (Sunday Evening), GREAT TUESDAY (Monday Evening) GREAT WEDNESDAY (Tuesday Evening); GREAT THURSDAY (Wednesday Evening)

CENTRAL THEME OF GREAT WEEK

- ❖ The Wedding between the King and His City – between Christ and His Church – Between Christ and Us

THE BRIDEGROOM ICON

“Every reference to the Bridegroom in Great Week has a particular image in mind; namely, the Bridegroom icon introduced on Sunday evening. Love for the Groom is coincident with an awareness of one's own culpability in his distressing state. Love for Christ in this context leads to a universal compassion, lest one risk one's wounding the Groom again (Professor, Timothy Patitsas, *The King Returns To His City*, p. 133).”

- ❖ “It is intended to be a depiction of the Christ according to Isaiah's vision of the *Man of Sorrows*.

It shows the details of Jesus's suffering at the hands of Pilate and the Sanhedrin, up to the moment when he is commanded to carry his cross to Golgotha.

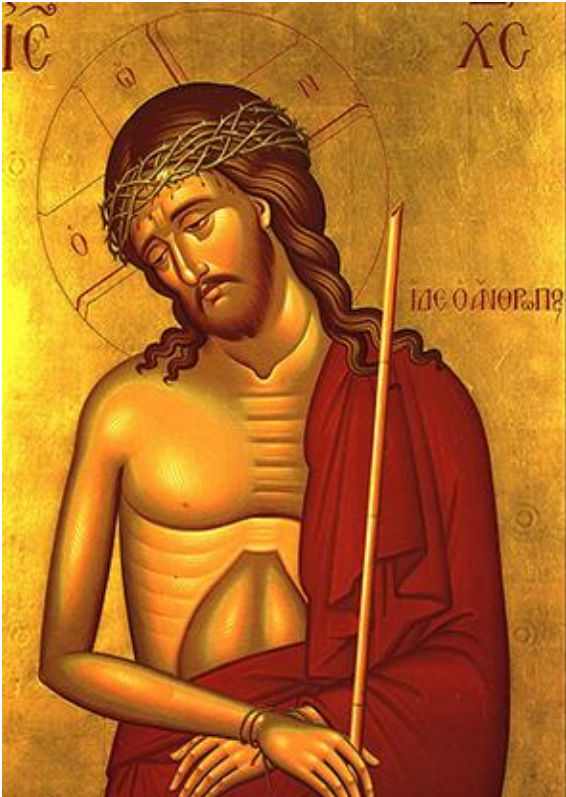
Isaiah 52:13-54:1

“But his form was ignoble, and inferior to that of the children of men; he was a man in suffering, and acquainted with the bearing of sickness, for his face is turned from us: he was dishonored, and not esteemed. He bears our sins,

and is pained for us: yet we accounted him to be in trouble, and in suffering, and in affliction. But he was wounded on account of our sins, and was bruised because of our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his bruises we were healed ... because of his affliction, opens not his mouth: he was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken away from the earth: because of the iniquities of my people he was led to death ... Rejoice, you barren that bears not; break forth and cry, you that does not travail: for more are the children of the desolate than of her that has a husband ...”

The Orthodox Christians are now invited to *look upon Him* who has come to suffer as a result of our sins.

“O unbelieving and adulterous generation of the Jews (Now us), draw near and look on Him whom once Isaiah saw: He is come for our sakes in die flesh. See how He weds the New Zion, for she is chaste, and rejects the synagogue that is condemned. As at a marriage pure and undefiled, the pure and innocent children gather and sing praises. Let us also sing with them the hymn of the angels. Hosanna in the highest to Him that has great mercy. (Hymn of 3rd hour)



THE PROCESSION OF THE ICON

“The procession echoes two other entries besides the normal festal one. It foreshadows the entry of the *Estavromenos – the One crucified* (almost life size icon of Christ crucified) after the reading of the 5th Gospel (Professor, Timothy Patitsas, *The King Returns To His City*, p. 114).”

"A True Tragedy, that the people designated by God to give the signs of the Messiah and to be the religious leaders. This is the Passion, the *crucifixion before the crucifixion*. He is in conflict with the very people who should know who He is! (Archbishop Demetrios Trakatellis).

Once the icon is placed in the middle of the church it is anointed with fragrant water evoking the anointing of a body for burial. (Patitsas).

The Hymns

"Behold, the Bridegroom comes at midnight and blessed is the servant whom He shall find watching, and again, unworthy is the servant whom He shall find heedless. Beware, therefore, O my soul, do not be weighed down with sleep, lest you be given up to death, and be shut out from the Kingdom. But, rouse yourself crying: Holy, Holy, Holy art Thou, O God. Through the Theotokos, have mercy on us."
(Bridegroom Hymn, Matins Great Monday)

- ❖ The icon underscores a redefinition of beauty (The Bridegroom is a victim of torture)
- ❖ The Man of Sorrows
- ❖ A call to repentance and vigilance (return to soberness)
- ❖ Preparing in the darkness of the Church to receive the resurrected Christ – for whom we are in watching, preparing
- ❖ Encountering Christ is always a moment of salvation and judgment – *lest I be shut out*

The total effect of this image, presented in procession with hymns, is to put the Christian on notice of the possibility of his damnation, while also inspiring love in him for his suffering judge (Professor, Timothy Patitsas, *The King Returns To His City*, p. 116).”

The hymns are meant to provoke within the faithful a sense of both their distance from and nearness to, the Christ. Christ’s arrival does not push the believer away, but it reveals the believer’s prior departure from him. (Patitsas)

“We know how deeply we still belong to "this world." We have seen the light, we know Christ, we have heard about the peace and joy of the new life in Him, and yet the world holds us in its slavery. This weakness, this constant betrayal of Christ, this incapacity to give the totality of our love to the only true object of love are wonderfully expressed in the exapostalarion of these three days (Schmemmann, *An Explanation of Holy Week*).”

THE WEDDING GARMENT

"Thy Bridal chamber I see adorned, O my Savior;
but I have no wedding garment that I may enter there.
Make the robe of my soul to shine, O Giver of Light, and save me.”

"Into the splendour of Thy saints how shall I enter? For I am unworthy,

and if I dare to come into the bridal chamber, my clothing will accuse me, since it is not a wedding garment; and I shall be cast out by the angels, bound hand and foot. Cleanse, O Lord, the filth from my soul and save me in Thy love for mankind." Great Tuesday, Matins at Ainoi 1, ME 106, LT 527, 285.

- ❖ At the approach of Christ all are found to be in the situation of Adam and Eve after the Fall. They are naked in one sense, clothed in rags of sin, in another. (Patitsas, pg. 137)
- ❖ Great Week's original function was to prepare catechumens for baptism – these hymn are meant to create a longing for spiritual cleaning. (Patitsas, pg. 138)
- ❖ Exodus 19:9-11 (read on Great Thursday morning) identifies *baptismal robes* with wedding garments.

“When Moses had told the words of the people to the Lord, the Lord said to Moses: "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow (baptize them). Have them wash their clothes (the vesture of their souls) and prepare for the third day (to be resurrected), because on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people." (Vespers of Great Thursday)

“Since the Fall, humans are no longer clothed with the radiant grace of God. This grace is the wedding garment required for entry into the Wedding Feast; all there are so clothed. Christians may regain this light through repentance - the practice of a lowly-minded compassion toward God, self, and others. Until they complete this repentance, they are unready for the Groom's appearing. His appearance would be a disaster for them, would be judgement and condemnation. Their entry into his wedding feast in their current state is unthinkable ... Despite the reality of this crisis, the real nakedness and dread of the Bride, and her desperate attempts to ready herself through an attempt at repentance, it turns out that he who is by nature the very Giver of Light has come not in spite of, but because of, the Bride's unreadiness. Beholding him, she wants to be the perfect bride. He counters with the reality that not only is he alone the source of her perfection, but his mission in coming to earth is to share that wholeness with her in her fallen state. He shares his anointing through his marriage to the Church. He comes as the New Adam, falls mystically asleep, and shares from his rib a new existence for the Church in the Eucharist. (Patitsas, pg. 142-3)

BEAUTY – FLOWERS

"Fairer in His beauty than all mortal men, He appears now as a corpse without form or comeliness, He who has made beautiful the nature of all things." Great Saturday) M at E-I-9, ME 295, LT 623-4, 721.

“Christ is not only supremely beautiful; he is the author of all beauty. His incarnation is a second genesis, recreating in an in himself, repeating man's ancient perfection in the beauty of his own life. Yet now Christ appears iconographically as a victim of torture and as a corpse ... Through his Passion he loses all form and beauty, but through this total humiliation he is able to strip the disfigurement from his bride and clothe her in "the glorious robe." "God who has adorned the whole earth with flowers is crowned with thorns ..." He endures ugliness in order to make man beautiful again ... The exchange of Christ's beauty for humanity's ugliness is met by gestures from the faithful. They adorn Christ with beautiful flowers at two moments during the Week, adorning the Bridegroom icon on Palm Sunday evening and the Kouvouklion (Sepulcher) which houses the Epitaphios (the Icon of the Body of Christ) on Great Friday. In both cases, the faithful are ameliorating a humiliation they have caused by their own sin. Christ promises to turn his assumed ugliness into their restored beauty, and in covering his humiliation with beauty, they remind

themselves of what he is doing for them. After the Resurrection, though, the flowers will be allowed to fade. The beauty of Christ has become permanent in his Resurrected body (The Church). (Patitsas, pg. 144-6)

THE HOLY SPIRIT AS WEDDING CROWN

“Great Week represents the dramatic moment when the Son comes before the Father to embrace fully in the flesh his eternal anointing by the Holy Spirit ... Great Week configures this *knowledge* in marital terms, as the consummation of a marriage between the Son and the Church. The Spirit, the *means and intensity* of that union, operates as the wedding crown, anointing both Son and Bride in eternal relation. (Professor, Timothy Patitsas, *The King Returns To His City*, p. 92-94).”

“Pascha means *passover*, passage. The Feast of Passover was for the Jews the annual commemoration of their whole history as salvation, and of salvation as passage from the slavery of Egypt into freedom ... Christ was the fulfillment of Pascha. He performed the ultimate passage: from death into life, from this *old world* into the new world, into the new *time* of the Kingdom. And he opened the possibility of this passage to us. Living in "this world" we can already be "not of this world," i.e., be free from slavery to death and sin, partakers of the "world to come." ***But for this we must also perform our own passage, we must condemn the old Adam in us, we must put on Christ in the baptismal death and have our true life hidden in God with Christ, in the "world to come..."*** And thus Easter is not an annual commemoration - - solemn and beautiful -- of a past event ... And the function of the three first days of the Holy Week is precisely to challenge us with this ultimate meaning of Pascha and to prepare us to the understanding and acceptance of it (Schmemmann, *An Explanation of Holy Week*).”

On Monday

At *Matins*: Matthew 21:18-43; the story of the fig tree, the symbol of the world created to bear spiritual fruits and failing in its response to God.

Synaxarion (A Gathering of Saints)

- ❖ Joseph the Son of Jacob (Genesis: 37-47)
 - The Patriarch Joseph is a symbol of chaste marriage (he refuses the advances of Potiphar's wife) (Patitsas)
 - Joseph is unjustly humiliated for practicing virtue which leads to both his and Christ's seat on a Royal throne. (Patitsas)
 - His chastity contrasted with Potiphar's wife casts Joseph as a New Adam, one who resists the temptations of Eve. (Patitsas)
- ❖ The Fig Tree
- ❖ The Three Holy Youths--Christ was with them (Daniel 3:19-25).

At the *Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts*: Matthew 24:3-35; the great eschatological discourse of Jesus. The signs and announcement of the End. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

Joseph – a type of Adam and of Christ

"The serpent found a second Eve in the Egyptian woman, and with words of flattery he sought to make Joseph fall. But, leaving his garment behind him, Joseph fled from sin; and like the first man before his disobedience, though naked he was not ashamed. At his prayers, O Christ, have mercy upon us." GM Mat Aposticha 4, ME 77, LT 516,221.

“The New Adam has come to harm through the sin of his intended bride. Potiphar’s wife symbolizes the Bride of Christ, the Church, in her state of impurity and passion. He suffers on account of her harlotry ... Christ’s shame, his nakedness, falls not on Him, but on mankind. It is humans that are no longer clothed with the light that adorned their parents before the Fall, and who are thus truly naked, not Christ on the Cross. (Professor, Timothy Patitsas, *The King Returns To His City*, p. 125).”

CHRIST THE VIRGIN – MAN THE HARLOT

“Christ’s purity is deeper (than Joseph’s), and extends to the fact that his very flesh is derived from a virgin, from a chaste conception ... He wears the ultimate pure wedding garment, a body formed from a virgin. The recognition of this purity is intended to produce a conviction of the Christian’s distance from Christ (Professor, Timothy Patitsas, *The King Returns To His City*, p. 126).”

THE FIG TREE AND THE WISE VIRGINS

Great Week finds two referents to the symbol of the Fig Tree

- ❖ The Jewish People – they possessed the Law and the Prophets (the leaves and branches of justice and knowledge) but did not bear the *fruit* of faith.

“In other words, "the Jews" (used as a technical term) signifies all people, but in particular Christians as they struggle to reconcile the awareness of their own sinfulness with the awareness that they are being saved through an intimate embrace with the God-man Jesus; after all, the intended audience of these hymns is Christians, not Jews (Professor, Timothy Patitsas, *The King Returns To His City*, p. 119-20).”

- ❖ Individual Christians must bear fruit in the form of works of mercy if they are to be saved.

"Think, wretched soul upon the hour of the end; recall with fear how the fig tree was cut down. Work diligently with the talent that is given to thee; be vigilant and cry aloud: May we not be left outside the bridal chamber of Christ." Great Tuesday, Matins at Kontakion, ME 103, LT 525,277.

“This hymn combines the sign of the fig tree's withering, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, Christ's injunction to the apostles to pray with him in the hour of his temptation, and the parable of the talents. In other words, the wise virgins are to learn the lesson of the fig tree, unlike the apostles, and thus to stay vigilant in prayer, thereby increasing their talent and remaining ready to enter the wedding feast. Repentance, the careful cultivation of virtues and right faith as the "fruit," "talents," and "lamps" which enable Christians to receive an incorruptible wedding crown, and to enter an eternal marriage feast. Though unworthy of it, Christians are to desire the bridal chamber of Christ. (Professor, Timothy Patitsas, *The King Returns To His City*, p. 128).”

"With a contrite soul we fall before Thee, and we pray to Thee, O Savior of the world: for Thou art the God of the repentant." (6TH Hour Troparion). 42

“This confession and this title for the Lord, *the God of the repentant*, turns every distance into closeness. Christ makes the both ironic and literal statement that *only the sick have need of a physician*. Here, only *harlots* can receive him as Groom, because his perfection shows that, relative to him, there are only harlots in the world. Since in the Bridegroom Matins Christians see their own sins as the reason for their redeemer's voluntary suffering on their behalf, their own sins are transformed from signs of judgement into invitations to reconciliation. They don't flee him, but *fall before* him (Professor, Timothy Patitsas, *The King Returns To His City*, p. 129).”