

Catechism & Theology

Session IV, Class I

March 26, 2024

“Behold! The Bridegroom sets forth in the dead of night. And blessed is that servant whom he shall find on watch; unworthy the one he shall come upon lazing. See to it, soul, that sleep does not overtake you, lest you be given up to death and be shut out of the kingdom. Bestir yourself, then, and sing out: "Holy, holy, holy are You, our God; through the protection of the bodiless powers, save us.”

- Apolytikion of Holy Monday Bridegroom Matins

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

- Jeremiah 31:31-33

“For your Maker is your husband, The LORD of hosts is His name; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth. For the LORD has called you Like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, Like a youthful wife when you were refused, Says your God.”

- Isaiah 54:5-17

“*This is* a faithful saying:

For if we died with *Him*,
We shall also live with *Him*.
If we endure,
We shall also reign with *Him*.
If we deny *Him*,
He also will deny us.
If we are faithless,
He remains faithful;
He cannot deny Himself.”

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II Timothy 2:10-13

“In union with God, the heart absorbs the Lord and the Lord the heart, and the two become one.”

- *Attributed to St. John Chrysostom by Callistus & Ignatius Xanthopoulos, (PhilokaliaIV)*



(Bridegroom Icon from Holy Week)

The most pervasive imagery of God’s relationship to Israel and to the Church is a marriage; of nuptial communion/union. Becoming one ‘spirit/body’ with God. Brought out on Holy & Great Monday, this icon remains in the center of the Church until Holy Thursday.

- Inspired by parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25: 1-13; oil (ἔλαιον) and mercy (ἔλεος), a play on words.

“The early days of that week feature services known as “Bridegroom Matins.” Their centerpiece is the icon of Christ as Bridegroom, a depiction of Him, bound and suffering. It is thought by

many that the original model for that icon is the same portion of the image on the Shroud of Turin. It is an image of death. We sing:

*Thy bridal chamber I see adorned, O my Savior,
and I have no wedding garment that I may enter.
O Giver of Light, enlighten the vesture of my soul, and save me.*

It is a hymn of deep irony and paradox. The “Bridal Chamber” carries a double meaning. It is, at once, the place of mystical union between Christ and His Bride (the Church). At the same time, it is the grave of Christ Himself. For that mystical union with Christ begins by being “buried with Christ in His death” (in Holy Baptism). The marriage of Christ and His Bride is in the paradox of the hideous maw of death’s domain, at the same time the place of Christ’s utter triumph over every adversary. We are not removed from that terrible place – we are healed *precisely* there. The resurrection of Christ begins in the tomb.”

- Fr. Steven Freeman

- We must enter this marital bed, too.
- The Bridegroom Matins are also Eschatological in orientation; about judgement.
- “Bridegroom” is used early in Gospel accounts: Gospel According to St. Mark, Chapter 2: “how can you fast when the Bridegroom is present”; Gospel According to St. John, Chapter 3: “I am the friend of the Bridegroom... he must increase I must decrease”
- We are the Bride of Christ (Not just Israel, the Church, but the whole creation)
- We were/are unfaithful: See Ezekiel 16; it is *eros* that God has for man. See Mystery of Wedding Epistle Ephesians 5: 25-33

(Theme taken from Rev. Fr. Eugene Pentiu, Ph.D., *Hearing the Scriptures*:)

Chastity: Joseph & the Midnight Bridegroom – Holy Monday

“On Holy and Great Monday, we make the remembrance of the blissful [*makariou*] Joseph the handsome [*pankalou*]: and also of the fig tree that was cursed by the Lord and withered.”

- From the Synaxarion for Holy Monday

- First three days of Holy Week form a distinct liturgical unit (Orthros, or Matins, is held in anticipation of the following day. (Using Jewish understanding of the day; from Genesis). The Presanctified Liturgy the following morning ends the day.
- With few exceptions, the readings from these first three days focus on the parables and sayings of Christ.

- The setting is Passion and Parousia
- One of the main themes is our being watchfulness; but is set within greater theme of the Lord's Chastity vs. our unfaithfulness. Joseph is also used as a model of chastity and endurance in temptation and trials; very much a foreshadowing of Christ by patristic commentators (see for example, St. Ephraim the Syrian, *On Joseph the Most Virtuous*).
- Also an eschatological theme of judgement (i.e. the fig tree, Matt. 21:18-22). According to the synoptic accounts, Holy Monday is also the day when Jesus cleansed the Temple.

“Jacob mourned the loss of Joseph, while the noble one rode in a chariot, honored as royalty. For having spurned the enticements of the Egyptian woman, he was in turn glorified by Him who knows the hearts of men and bestows an incorruptible crown.”

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Kontakion of Holy Monday

- Two scriptural periscopes: from the OT, the “Joseph Cycle” (Genesis 37-50), and the cursing of the fig tree (Matthew 21:18-22).
- Chastity is one of the main themes of Holy Monday. Contrast is between the chaste Joseph (i.e. despair, or Potiphar's wife, anger against his brothers, etc.) and the fruitless fig tree, symbolizing idleness and carelessness.

“...For the lawless Jews thought then,
that if he were crucified, he would die as a human;
the wretches not being persuaded that God had come,
for salvation, to save our souls.
Just as Joseph said quite openly
to his brothers, making them fear and tremble,
'I am Joseph, whom you sold [into slavery],
but now I rule over you, though you did not want it'. [Cf. Gen 45:4]
So too the Lord shows the Cross
in an image formed of light to those who crucified him,
and they recognize the Cross itself
and the Son of God who was crucified by them.
Know how accurately Joseph became
a true type of his own Master.”

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St. Ephraim the Syrian, Excerpt from “*Sermon on Joseph the Most Virtuous*”