

LENTEN JOURNEY CLASS

March 28, 2023: The Bridegroom Service

“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.”

- 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)*

“Oh, the wretchedness of Judas!

He saw the harlot kiss the footsteps of Christ,
but deceitfully he contemplated the kiss of betrayal.

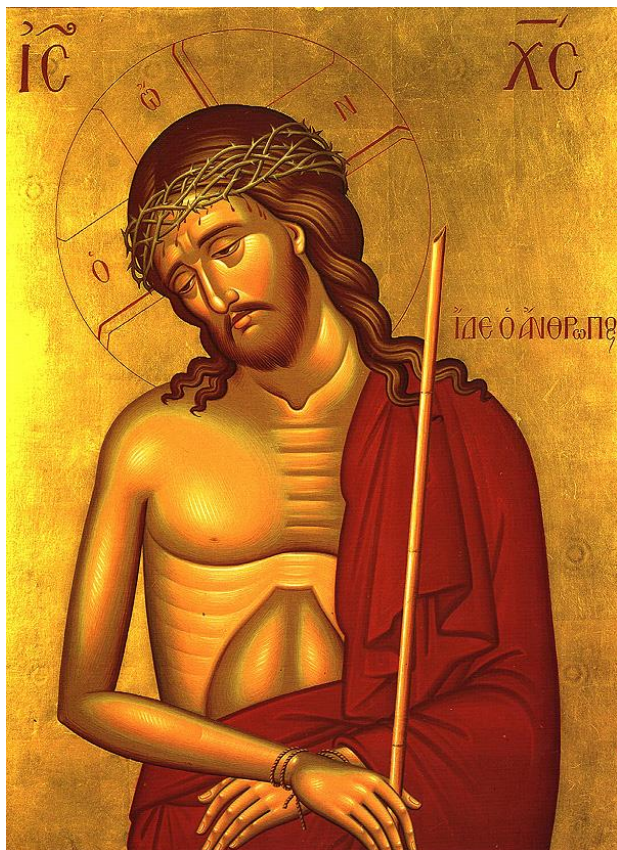
She loosed her hair while he bound himself with wrath.

He offered the stench of wickedness instead of myrrh,
for envy cannot distinguish value.

Oh, the wretchedness of Judas!

Deliver our souls, from this, O God.”

- Praise Verses of Bridegroom Matins of Holy Wednesday



(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.

- See Ezekiel 16; it is *eros* that God has for man.
- See Mystery of Wedding Epistle Ephesians 5: 25-33

“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.

(Themes taken from Rev. Fr. Eugene Pentuc, Ph.D., *Hearing the Scriptures*.)

Chastity: Joseph and 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

“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.”

- 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.”

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

Loyalty: Three Youth in the Fiery Furnace – Holy Tuesday

“On Holy and great Tuesday, we make remembrance of the parable of the ten virgins [parthenōn] from the Holy Gospel.”

- From the Synaxarion for Holy Tuesday

“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.”

- Kontakion of Holy Monday

“Let us love the Bridegroom, O Brethren. Let us keep our lamps aflame with virtues and true faith, so that we, like the wise virgins of the Lord, may be ready to enter with Him into the marriage feast. For the Bridegroom, as God, grants unto all an incorruptible crown.”

- Kathisma Hymn of Bridegroom Matins of Holy Tuesday

“Soul, mindful of your final hour, and dreading the fate of the fig tree, cultivate with diligence the talent you were given. Endure, be vigilant, and say: "May we not be shut out of the bridal chamber!"

- Kontakion of Holy Tuesday

- “Midnight Bridegroom” theme continues. Emphasis is on watchfulness drawn from the parable of ten virgins (Mathew 25:1-13), read at the Presanctified Liturgy.
- Also a theme included in the hymnography is the story of the Three Holy Youths from Daniel 3. Focus is on loyalty/fidelity to God.

Reading for Holy Tuesday:

“Today we bring to mind the parable of the ten virgins, which our Savior related as He was coming to His Passion. This parable teaches us that the accomplishment of the great work of virginity should not make us careless in other matters, especially in almsgiving, wherewith the lamp of virginity is made radiant. Furthermore, it teaches us that we should not be remiss about the end of our life, but should be prepared for it at every moment, like the wise virgins, so that we may meet the Bridegroom, lest He come suddenly and the doors of the heavenly bridechamber be shut, and we also, like the foolish virgins, hear that dread sentence: "Amen, I say unto you, I know you not" (Matt. 25:1-13).”

Bravery: A Daring Woman and a Hiding Eve – Holy Wednesday

“On Holy and Great Wednesday, remembrance should be made of the prostitute woman [*pornēs gynaikos*] who anointed [*aleipsasēs*] the Lord with [fragrant] oil [*myrō*], as the most divine fathers decreed [*ethespian*], that this occurred shortly[micron] before the saving Passion.”

- From the Synaxarion for Holy Wednesday

“Though I have outdone the harlot in sin, yet I have offered You no shower of tears. Rather, I fall before You fervently kissing Your spotless feet, praying silently that, as Master, You will remit my debts as I cry: "Savior, free me from the foulness of my deeds!"

- Kontakion of Holy Wednesday

- Hymns of Holy Wednesday focuses on difference of the fallen woman and of Judas. There is also a contrast of the sinful woman who anoints Christ’s feet and the old Eve. Both sinful, while one runs and hides in fear, the other approaches with repentance to the Lord to be freed of sin.
- Gospel focus is Matthew 26 6-16 in the Presanctified Liturgy. This is the story of the righteous woman anointing Christ’s feet before the crucifixion. But the hymnography is

drawn from the anointing of the Lord's feet by the sinful woman, Kassiani, in Luke 7:36-50.

- The Lord's feet are a theme here: Eve ran from the "feet whose walking sound was perceived in the garden" (Genesis 3:8), and the sinful woman runs to anoint those feet.

Reading for Holy Wednesday:

"Two women - say the more discerning interpreters of the Gospel - anointed the Lord with myrrh; the one, a long time before His Passion; the other, a few days before. One was a harlot and sinner; the other, chaste and virtuous. The Church commemorates this reverent act today. While mentioning herein the person of the harlot, it also mentions Judas' betrayal; for, according to the account in Matthew, both of these deeds took place two days before the Passover, on Wednesday.

That woman, then, anointed Jesus' head and feet with very precious myrrh, and wiped them with the tresses of her hair. The disciples, especially the avaricious Judas, were scandalized, supposedly because of the waste of the myrrh, which could be sold for a great price and given to the poor. The Lord Jesus reproved them and told them not to trouble the woman. Indignant, Judas went to the high priests, who were gathered in the court of Caiaphas and were already taking counsel against Jesus. On agreeing with them to betray his Teacher for thirty pieces of silver, Judas sought from that time opportunity to betray Him (Matt. 26:14-16). Because the betrayal took place on Wednesday, we have received the tradition from Apostolic times to fast on Wednesday throughout the year."