

SETTING THE STAGE FOR HOLY WEEK

Some 700 years before Christ came into the world to fulfill God's plan for our salvation, the Prophet Isaiah, set the stage for the events that will unfold before our eyes and the reason they came to pass during the days ahead which we refer to as "Great and Holy Week."

Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Palm Sunday

April 28, 2013

Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor; Subdeacon Daniel J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris, Cantors Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158

We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area.

We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people.

We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.

We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.

We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.

We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us 2 Corinthians 4: 5 - 8.

GLAD TIDINGS

+++ We have festal anointing today on the occasion of our Lord's Triumphal Entry into Jeruslaem. Palms and Pussy Willows are blessed and distributed.

+++ Today a special holyday offering is taken after the homily. Please be generous.

+++ The special offering for flowers to beautify our church for the coming holy days was taken. It is still not too late to be generous with your offering if you were not with us last Sunday.

+++ During this coming Passion Week, all are asked to fast from meat in preparation for the august feast of the Resurrection.

+++ We thank the good souls who came Friday to prepare the church for our glorious holy day celebration. God bless you devoted faithful souls who love the beauty of the House of the Lord!

+++ Please be generous in gratitude for the victorious gift of eternal life next Sunday as we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord.

+++ Please keep the intentions of these members of our parish intercession community in your daily prayers: Anna, Ryan, Betty, Mary, Beth, Ann Helene, Debra and Michael.

+++ The sign-up sheet for both the Web Site and Bulletin sponsors is on the bulletin board in the kitchen. Please sign up as soon as possible. Do NOT make payment until your sign-up month has arrived. This will make it easier for Father to keep track of payments. Thanks in advance to all who support the parish in this way.

+++ We invite all our parishioners to offer for seven day lights to beautify our church for the Passion Week and Resurrection services. Please remember to offer prayers for your intentions as the candles are lighted.

+++ All are asked to sign up for the Sepulcher Vigil from Great and Holy Friday evening to Great and Holy Saturday services.

+++ We offer thanks to the Blessed Trinity for inspiring generosity in the souls of our faithful and the blessing of abundant grace in our midst with the offering received last Sunday: Tithing Offering, \$433.00; Candles, \$12.00; Self Sacrifice Great Fast Offering, \$85.00; Food Coupons, \$140.00; Flowers, \$115.00; Kitchen, \$163.00; Holy Day \$35.00, for a total of \$983.00. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offer their God-given treasure and labored for the sake of the Lord and the good of our parish. God bless and reward you good and faithful souls! The attendance was 44 adults and 13 children last Sunday.

+++ As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Father Lucas, Pani Lucas, Eleni Pallas, Anna Zacharyczuk, Marilyn Korba, Eleanor Korba, Michael Douglas, Maria Garcia and Pani Buletza.

+++ We make a **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN** Canister available for our faithful to bring in pennies for our altar and its appointments. We are already in receipt of **\$1694.00** from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.

+++ Please be certain to see a member of the Parish Council if you would like to help our parish by using **Shop Rite Food Coupons** available in \$20.00 denominations. We invite **ALL** to be caring and supportive and use Grocery Coupons for food shopping as we have gratefully realized \$5550.00 on this project to date!

FROM

THE

CROSS





Jesus speaks from the Cross

Crucifixion was a lonely, gruesome, painful way to die. The method must have been designed in hell by the chief enemy of man. It killed, slowly and with agony. In fact, it often prolonged life longer than pain could be felt. Victims would simply go into shock and remain barely alive, breathing by unconscious will. At this point, the executioners had an effective practice. They broke the legs of the condemned and swiftly caused them to die of suffocation.

During the hours of excruciating suffering, Jesus made several statements. His words were brief. Certain physical aspects of crucifixion insured that no long speeches were made. Breathing was very difficult. The crucified companions of Jesus quickly became silent. But He had some very important things to say.

Most will agree that a person's comments at the door of eternity deserve special attention, so how much more the final words of Jesus Christ from the cross. Seven times He spoke. During this time we will ponder those truths.

The crowd watched Luke 23: 35. Where do you stand when you look at the cross? The impact of the final hours of our Lord on our heart and soul depends on our perspective. Do we approach the cross in derision and doubt or do we come near to its base in humble adoration and gratitude? Do we stand back in fear or despair, sharing the incredulity of those who expected one thing from the Lord and got something else they did not quite understand? Or do we stand back in awe, continually amazed by the significance of the suffering of God the Son?

Deliberately changing our place of view can alter and improve our understanding of the cross. Drawing near or back can help to see the cross in new and contrasting light. One dimension open to our imagination puts us above the cross, viewing events and people from the perspective of our heavenly Father. We note for instance, that the statements of Jesus move out on concentric circles, beginning with the soldiers at his feet and moving outward to

reach the finish line. Alter your position and you will alter your perspectives of the cross. This is literally crucial meditation and worship.

Forgiving enemies

Father forgive them for they know not what they do Luke 23: 34. St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan in the fourth century, reminds us of the value of right and correct understanding and belief. It is profitable for us to know that Christ bore our diseases and submitted himself to my lusts for my sake. He became sin and a curse for me, for everyone, that is. He was humbled and became a servant for me. He is the Lamb, the Vine, the Rock, the Servant and the Son of a Virgin handmaiden for me. He does not know the Day of Judgment, but for my sake, is ignorant of the day and hour. What a glorious remedy, to have comfort in Christ! For He bore these things with enormous patience for our sake, so we definitely cannot bear them just for the glory of his name with common patience! Who would not learn to forgive their enemies when they see that, even from the cross, Christ prayed for those who persecuted him? Do you not see that the weaknesses of Christ are your strengths? So why do you ask him about remedies for us? His tears wash us and His weeping cleanses us. But if you begin to doubt, you will despair. For the greater the insult the greater gratitude is due!

Praying for enemies

What is perfection of love? To love even our enemies and to love them so they might become fellow Christians is an imperative for the baptized believer. For love should not be fleshly. To wish people temporal physical well-being is good. But when this fails, we must hope that their souls are saved. Do you wish life for your friend? You do well! Do you rejoice at the death of your enemy? You do evil! However, even the life you wish for your friends may not be good for them. And the death of your enemies you rejoice over may have been for the good of them. If it is uncertain where this present life will be profitable or unprofitable for someone, but without doubt, life with God is profitable. So love your enemies by wishing and so living that they become Christians. Love your enemies so they might fellowship with you and learn from your example. For Christ loved this way and while hanging on the cross, said, *Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do*. He did not say, "Father let them live long. Even though they kill me, let them live." He was taking eternal death from them in

his own merciful prayer and his supreme strength. Augustine of Hippo passes on this wisdom to us, "Therefore, if you have learned to pray for your enemy, you walk in the way of the Lord."

Remember him

You have heard an insult, like the wind. You are like a wave. When the wind blows and the swells, the ship is then endangered, the heart is in jeopardy and the heart is tossed back and forth. When you were insulted you longed for revenge. But if you have avenged and so rejoice in the person's pain, you have suffered shipwreck. Why is this? Because Christ is asleep in you. What does it mean that Christ is asleep in you? That you have forgotten Christ! Rouse him then. Call Christ to mind and let him wake up; in you. Pay attention to him and his presence. What do you want? Revenge. Have you forgotten that, when He was being crucified, Christ said, *Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?* The one sleeping in your heart does not want revenge. Awaken him, then, remember him. Remember him through his word, for He commands us to remember him. Then when Christ awakens in you, you will say, "What kind of person am I who wants revenge? Who am I to threaten other people? I might die before I am avenged, therefore I will restrain my anger and return to a calm heart." For when Christ commanded the sea, peace returned and was restored!

Such love

Of all the scenes around the cross, this one often angers most people. What kind of people, we must ask ourselves, would mock a dying man?

The words thrown from swollen lips were meant to wound. And there is nothing more painful than words meant to hurt. Of course, this is nothing new for any who can hear. No doubt all have had their share of words that wound. Just about everyone has felt the sting of a well-aimed gibe. Maybe you are feeling it right now. Someone you love or respect slams you to the floor with a slur or a slip of the tongue. Intentional or unintentional, it is still painful. And there you lie, wounded and bleeding. Perhaps the words were intended to hurt, perhaps not; but that does not matter because the wound left behind is deep.

Do we know what our Lord did not do? He did not retaliate.

Do we see what Jesus did do? He spoke in their defense. *Father, forgive them for they know not what they do*

Never, never before or since have we seen such love!

Incarnate forgiveness

The cross tilted skyward and then slid into the worn hole in the rocky forehead called Golgotha. The rough jolt sent fire through limbs just pierced by nails. Further agony followed as the soldiers drive wedges between stone and timber to keep the crucifix upright for the raving crowd to see.

With his first breath Jesus exhaled words we find incredible in that setting and hard to believe when we hear them applied to us. And yet, these words should not surprise us. Jesus always looked through forgiving eyes. Confronted with a lame man dropped through a ceiling by desperate friends, Jesus responded with forgiveness, the deepest and most enduring healing. Approached by his cross-companion with a helpless humble plea, *Remember me*, Jesus answered with assured forgiveness. Jesus is God's incarnate forgiveness; He is the physical manifestation of the Father's eager forgiving embrace. How could He not forgive and ask the Father not to forgive those who unwittingly helped him accomplish forgiveness?

Your value

Today you will be with me in paradise Luke 23: 43. Now why did Jesus have to do that? What in the world did He have to gain by promising a desperado a place of honor at the banquet table? What in the world could this chiseling quisling ever offer in return? Nothing!

That is precisely the point. Listen closely. The love of Christ does not depend on what we do for him. Not at all. In the eyes of the Saviour you have value simply because you are. You do not have to look nice or perform well. Your value is inborn. You are his unique creation.

Period.

Think about that just for a minute. You are valuable just because you were created and exist. Not because of what you do or what you have done, but simply because you are. Do not forget you are created in the image of your Maker. Never forget that! Remember that the next time you are left bobbing in the wake of someone's steamboat of ambition. Remember that the next time some trickster tries to hang a bargain-basement price tag on your self-worth. The next time someone tries to pass you off as a cheap buy, just think about the way Jesus honors you...and smile.

Hope of paradise

What follows crucifixion? What happens after perseverance in faith? Paradise! Fellowship with the faithful of God, with those who are believers, who have persevered, who have *...become partners of Christ if we maintain to the end that confidence with which we began* Hebrews 3: 14. The second statement of our Lord from the cross was the promise of Paradise to one of the malefactors being crucified with him.

All suffering has to end. To those who believe faithfully in Jesus Christ, it has a beginning and it has an end. It will not go on forever because it is controlled by the Alpha and the Omega. The end for every believer is Paradise and Paradise belongs to our God. It is the reward of those who persevere, who overcome. *I will see to it the victor eats from the tree of life which grows in the Garden of God* Revelation 2: 7. Isn't that a beautiful and compelling promise of our God to each of us?

What do we need in the midst of suffering? Hope! The hope of glory, of life, of fellowship with the Victor. And what do we need to convey to others as we hang there suffering? We

need to convey the reality and glory of the sure hope of heaven! That is inspiration enough for a disciple of Christ!

Today

Few of us get to know ahead of time the day we will pass from measured time into eternity. The thief on the cross received that privilege and an infinitely greater gift of an unexpected destination: Paradise! While deathbed conversions are not the norm and should not be looked forward to or even planned and anticipated, the assurance of Jesus raises at least one larger question: How was the thief transformed from a sinner on the way to eternal separation from God into a traveler destined for eternal fellowship with God? What did he do to be saved?

To ears accustomed to a very precise and measured, even canned vocabulary of salvation, the words of the thief may sound unsophisticated and even incomplete. There is nothing like the traditional "sinner prayer." Yet our Lord accepted the petition of the penitent malefactor as repentance and recognized the faith which inspired it. The man contrasted his sinful and separated condition and the unique role of Jesus as Saviour and Messiah. He did not assume forgiveness; he actually asked. Jesus responded with a wholehearted royal reprieve because the conditions were right for opening heaven's treasure of forgiveness. The Lord commuted this sinner's sentence of eternal punishment onto his own inclusive impending death. Further interaction could wait until Paradise.

Here is your Son

When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold your son' John 19: 26. It was to his godly mother that Jesus turns in his dying hour. His last thoughts are of her, not with any thought of being comforted by her as she had so often done when He was a child, but of her pain and of her future once He leaves this earth. His heart is a heart of flesh and his chivalrous manhood would not permit him to forget the one who had brought him into the world. Thus from the pulpit of his cross, He preaches to all ages a sermon on the Fifth Commandment.

In the midst of all Jesus was enduring in that dread hour, he thinks of Mary, of her who had been the guardian of his childhood and youth, and gives her as the inestimable legacy of love to his much-loved disciple, John. The injunction is to comfort widows in their affliction and Mary was much afflicted as she stood witness by the cross, perhaps the only one of the family to witness the death of her son, she must have been greatly comforted as He makes every provision for her future security. The love, providing salvation by the cross was not unmindful of the material provision a bereaved widowed mother would need.

What kind of God?

The Virgin Mother is older now. Although hidden beneath her head covering, the short cut hair at her temples is grey. Wrinkles have replaced her youthful complexion. Her hands are no doubt calloused, perhaps arthritic. Now she beholds the crucifixion of her Savior and our God.

Question: What kind of God would put people through such agony? What kind of God would give family and then ask you to leave them? What kind of God would give you friends and ask you to say goodbye?

Answer: A loving God who know that the deepest and most abiding love is built not on simple passion and ordinary romance but on a common mission and sacrifice!

Answer: A God who knows that we are only pilgrims and that eternity is so close that any "goodbye" is in reality a "See you later."

Answer: A God who did it himself.

John fastens his arm around Mary a little tighter, providing somewhat more security. Jesus was asking him to be the son that a mother needs and that in some ways He never was.

Jesus looks at Mary. His ache is from pain far greater than that of the nails and thorns and open wounds on his back rubbing against the rough wood. In their silent glance they again share a secret. And for the moment, He says good bye.

Take care of her

Jesus must have had many interesting conversations with his mother, but we are privy to only three of them. Each of these exchanges involved their unique relationship - He as the eternal Son of God, she as Birthgiver of God. Their interaction was undoubtedly complicated.

Initially Jesus gently corrects Mary's frantic declaration of concern by reminding her that she *...should have known I would be at my Father's house* Luke 2: 50. In the prelude of his first miracle during the wedding at Cana in Galilee, Jesus hears Mary voice a leading concern, *They have no more wine...do whatever he tells you* John 2: 1 - 12. Jesus' response reminds his mother that her priorities are not necessarily his. Her agreement and understanding give him the freedom to act on behalf of the wedding party.

Among the final tasks in his earthly life, Jesus saw to his mother's care. He entrusted Mary and John to each other as mother-son. A sad tone of separation colors the term "woman" and highlights Jesus' loving transfer of his mother's allegiance from him to John, whom He also particularly loved. The universal effectiveness of the ministry of our Lord as Messiah receives delightful confirmation in the way that He undertook for the common human, and necessary duties of genuine living. His divinity shines dearly through matchless humanity.

Family of believers

Our Lord emphasizes the human family, but even more, places value on the spiritual family of our heavenly Father. The genuine, enduring and abiding relationship is not that of the flesh, but of the Spirit. As wonderful as earthly relationships are, there is a more intimate relationship between the children of God. John, as a believer in Christ, is a better choice to care for the mother of Jesus than brothers or sisters who do not believe. The living reality of

relationships is made plain by the Lord beforehand. *Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? Then, extending his hand toward his disciples, he said, There are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is brother and sister and mother to me* Matthew 12: 48; Mark 3: 33; Luke 8: 21.

Jesus brings into being the brotherhood of believers and creates a new society that is not segregated by race or nationality, nor predicated on social standing or economic power. It is not limited by bone, flesh, or bloodlines. Its relationships are purely and specifically spiritual, having value in faith response to the love of Jesus Christ. This is what believers have in common. It has no limitations and spans eternity! The prescribed reading of the glorious and triumphant feast of the Resurrection in the flesh reminds us of pre-eminent spiritual values. *He came unto his own and his own received him not, But to as many as received him, he gave the power to become sons of God; to those who believe in his name; who were born not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God* John 1: 12, 13.

The faith of believers converges at the cross whose experience offers forgiveness which flows from it. Jesus commends his own mother to the spiritual care of a devoted disciple of one heart, mind and soul with him. Atop Golgotha that terrible day, Christ calls upon a brother in faith, a communicant of the family of faith, to minister to one in need. That is still part of his encompassing call to those who are communicants in God's family.

Forsaken

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me Matthew 27: 46?

The eternal Father forsakes Jesus on the cross. It was not his imagination! God had actually abandoned his Son, leaving him in the throes of sin's awful death. Jesus had no recourse; He had no aid. In that one inexplicably horrendous moment, the Father and the Holy Spirit are estranged from the Son.

The cry had been recorded a thousand years earlier and echoed his agony when prophetically penned by the psalmist, *May God, my God, why have you forsaken me* Psalms 22: 1? Inspired and written by the Word and read countless times by the Word who became flesh!

Now it is fulfilled and screamed into the eagerly listening ears of the Holy God who had to vanquish sin, for He who knew no sin was at that moment made to be sin for us! *For our sakes, God made him who did not sin, to be sin, so that in him we might become the very holiness of God* 2 Corinthians 5: 21.

The hour arrived, the eternal hour of destiny. Never before and never again would there be a momentous time like it when Almighty God, the eternal Father and God the Holy Spirit would forsake God the Son for the sake of mankind made in his image. He did it that we who were dead, estranged from life in God might live, never again to be forsaken by him. *Blessed are they whose sin is covered* Romans 4: 7; *despite the increase of sin, grace has far surpassed it* Romans 5: 20; *If Christ is in you the body is dead because of sin, while the spirit lives because of justice. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will bring your mortal bodies to life also, through his Spirit dwelling in you* Romans 8: 10, 11.

Enthroned upon that awful tree,
Lamb of God, your grief I see.
Darkness veils your anguished face;
none its lines of woe can trace.
None can tell what pangs unknown
hold you silent and alone.

Silent through those three dread hours,
wrestling with evil powers.
Left alone with human sin,
gloom around you and within,
until the appointed time is nigh,
until the Lamb of God may finally die.

Listen, that cry that peals aloud

upward through the overwhelming crowd!
You, the Father's only Son,
You, his own anointed one,
You are asking, "can it be?"
"Why have you forsaken me?"

Completely qualified

Jesus ...*learned obedience through what he suffered* Hebrews 5: 8, as the Apostle to the Gentiles asserts, in the sense that by his suffering in the flesh He learned the cost of his wholehearted obedience to the Father. They were of like mind and being. His acceptance of the cross crowned his obedience, and He was never more pleasing to the Father than in this act of total devotion, yet that does not diminish the reality of his experience of being God-forsaken. But this reality has made him all the more effective as the Deliverer and Supporter of his own people whom He created. He is no visitor from another world, avoiding too much involvement with this world of ours. He has totally involved himself in our human lot. There is no depth of dereliction-known to human beings which He has not plumbed; by this means. He has been ...*made perfect* Hebrews 5: 8, that is to say, completely qualified to be the sympathizing helper of his people in their most extreme need. If they feel like crying to God, *Why have you forsaken me* Mark 15: 34? they can reflect that that is what He experienced and heartfully and soulfully cried as well. And it is our sinfulness that associated him with our separation. When we cry out of the depths of pain and anxiety and separation, to our Creator God, He who called out of the depths of all creation and eternity on Great and Holy Friday, knows what it feels like. But there is this profound difference: He is with his people now to strengthen them in their salutary aspirations because before that moment, there was no one there to strengthen and intercede for them! The story of mankind is now radically different and positive!

Words we will not have to say

Jesus begins his first and last words from the cross in the same way, with the same word: Father. What a sharp contrast with this low center point in the crisis of the cross, when Jesus experienced the full depth and distance of alienation and actual separation from the eternal

Father as He took on himself the sins of mankind! Fully human, Jesus calls out from the enclosing separating darkness of God's withdrawal. He did not, in that moment address God as Father, but simply as *My God, my God* Matthew 27: 46. The identification and substitution for humanity reaches its seemingly devastating climax.

The gospel writers, choked and humbled by the significance, seem to have been compelled to record the actual words in the native dialect, as if the Aramaic had a particular poignancy in conveying the Lord's felt dereliction. The expression is so clear that it deserved to be heard and even felt, even experienced before it was understood because they included a translation for posterity.

Sadly, the leering crowds gathered that day totally misunderstood. The linguistic diversity of Jerusalem at Passover resulted in a low roar of speculation, guessing that Jesus meant to call on the Prophet Elias for helping assistance. The mixed reaction was wrong on all counts. We now know that Jesus cried out those words so that we would never have to say them, never have to repeat them in our own circumstances.

God could not look

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me and from the words of my groaning Psalms 22: 1? As our Lord hung there stained, saturated and sin-laden, the eternal Father could not look at his only-begotten Son. Why? Christ was bearing every vile, degrading vice that depraved human beings have ever committed or would ever commit. His body and soul were completely immersed with man's abominations. He bore the outright disobedience of Adam, the murderous act of Cain, the wretched adultery of David, and the murders of Christians by Saul of Tarsus. He bore every sin committed since the inception of history and every sin which will be committed until the world passes.

Never in the annals of man's story earth, had so much sin been carried at one time, and it was carried by the sinless one. It was embodied by the sinless, holy, God-man, Christ Jesus, the Messiah, the Saviour and this is why the Father turned away from the voice of his Son as Christ took our place. It is we who are so grotesque that we cannot in truth associate with the

holiness of our God. Truly it is our sin, our wickedness, our transgressions, our iniquities, our abominations that turned the face of God away from this heartbreaking event.

He knows what we experience

Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, I thirst John 19: 28. Just at the exact right time we are reminded the One to whom we pray and are irrevocably committed knows us perfectly. He knows temptation, He has felt discouraged. He has been hungry and sleepy and tired. He knows what we feel like when the alarm clock goes off. He knows what we feel like when our children want different things at the same time. He nods in understanding when we pray in anger. He is touched when we tell him there is more to do than can ever be done. He smiles when we confess our weariness in sinning and are eager to seek forgiveness in the sacramental Mystery of Reconciliation.

I thirst John 19: 28.

He wants us to remember that He, too, is human. He wants us to know that He, too, knows the drone of the humdrum and the weariness that comes with long days. He wants us to remember that our trailblazer did not wear bullet proof vests or rubber gloves or an impenetrable suit of armor. No, He pioneers the salvation through the same world we all face daily.

He is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and the Word and Light of Life. More than ever He is the Morning Star, the Horn of Salvation and the Prince of Peace.

And there are some hours when we are restored by remembering our God became flesh and dwelt among us. Our Master knew what it means to be a crucified carpenter who got thirsty for and wanted the love of his choice creation.

Thirsty

The physical aspects of the work of salvation were now done. Jesus experienced on our behalf the utter separation between God and humanity created by our sin. All that remained was the final victory over death by entering into the mystery of death. All that would conclude his earthly eternal mission was to submit to death. Jesus expressed his current condition with out expectation of relief. He was simply stating a fact of his exhaustion and thirst. The word probably came out as an actual croak. The body could barely sustain the life that lingered and burned within him. His physical dimension was not able to express itself. The dampened sponge that touched his parched lips served no other purpose than to fuel his final two utterances.

In a special and unique way, Jesus experienced on the cross the truth of the fourth beatitude, that one that describes those who reach the place where they *...are hungry and thirsty for justice* Matthew 5: 6. Jesus lived daily with that thirst as real and as overwhelming as his dry, swollen tongue and his parched throat in that moment. And in every sense of the word, He knew He was about to be satisfied.

It is finished

When Jesus took the wine, he said, It is finished. Then he bowed his head and delivered over his spirit John 19: 30. The word Christ employs well deserves our attention, for it shows that the whole accomplishment of our salvation and all it entails are contained in his sacrificial death. His resurrection is not separated from his death on the cross, but Christ only intends to keep our faith fixed on him and not allow it to turn aside in any direction. The meaning therefore is that everything which contributes to the salvation of man is to be found only in Jesus Christ and ought not be sought anywhere else, the perfection of salvation is contained only in him. There is also an implied contrast, for Christ contrasts his death with the ancient sacrifices and with all the past figures. It is as if He said, Of all that was practiced under the Law, there was nothing that had any power in itself to make salvation from sin, to appease the offended God and to obtain justification, but now all true salvation is exhibited and manifested to the whole of creation for all time. The very purpose of the coming in the flesh of the second Person of the Divine Trinity is achieved and fulfilled.

Divine decree

The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment in history of the very mind, purpose and intent of our heavenly Father. There is no place for seeing him as a martyr. His death is not something that happened to him, something that might have been prevented. His death is the very reason He came among us.

Never build your case for forgiveness and reconciliation on the idea that God is our Father and He will forgive us because He loves us. That contradicts the revealed truth of God in Jesus Christ. It makes the Cross unnecessary and the redemption much about nothing. God forgives us only because of the death of Christ. God could forgive people in no other way than by the death of his Son and Jesus is exalted as Saviour because of his death for our sake. The greatest note of triumph ever sounded in the ears of a startled universe was that which reverberated from the Cross of Christ...*It is finished* John 19: 30. That is the final word in the redemption of humanity. Separation is annihilated and reconciliation is initiated.

Jesus became a curse for us, by divine decree. Our part in realizing the tremendous meaning of his assumption of our curse is the conviction of sin. Conviction is given to us as a gift of shame and repentance; it is the great mercy of God manifesting itself. Jesus Christ hates sin in his people and Golgotha is the measure of his hatred for this abomination of separation from the security and holiness of God.

Paid in full

After the sacrifice of Christ, there is no longer any need to shed blood in the temple. He *...entered not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, and achieved eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of heifer's ashes could sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself up unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God* Hebrews 9: 12 - 14?

The Son of God became the Lamb of God, the cross became the altar and we are ...*sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time* Hebrews 10: 10. What need to be paid was paid. The indebtedness was assumed by God. Innocent blood was required. Innocent blood was offered, once and for all time. Bury these five words in the depth of your heart and soul: *Once for all time*. What God had to do is done and over. The separation and infraction started and begun by man is finished in reconciliation by the eternal Father in Jesus Christ. All that remains is for man to associate himself in grace with the salutary work of the Lord. Now it is up to us!

A cry for victory

After the inspired writer of Hebrews compiled his list of great examples of faith recorded in the eleventh chapter, he abruptly changes the paradigm by making the heroes of faith into a ...*huge cloud of witnesses* Hebrews 12: 1, watching from the grandstand of history. Now the spotlight shifts to "us" who are preparing to run the race. How do we run? We do this by... *keeping our eyes focused on Jesus who inspires and perfects our faith* Hebrews 12: 2, and on whom our faith depends from start to finish. The writer goes on to describe the awesome work of Jesus on the cross: *For the sake of the joy which lay before him he endured the cross, heedless of its shame. He has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God* Hebrews 12: 2.

Seeing the end result or visualizing the completed effort offers only a taste of the moment of completion and victory. The triumphant cry of Jesus echoed through all creation, forever turning the tables on evil's dominion. His work was done; his goal reached; his challenge met; his purpose achieved; his great battle won. We cannot add to our salvation, not simply because we are unable, but because He has already declared it complete, finished!

He gave it up

His death is different. It is a victorious death. It is unique. It is triumphant. He brought his spoils with him. It was a vicarious death. It had no personal claim on him except as the representative of sinners. He was doing man's dying for him. It was a voluntary death. No man can take his life from him. He laid it down by himself. The record plainly insists that He

cried with a loud voice and gave up his spirit. That is what death entails: the separation of the physical body and the spiritual soul, its principal of life. He did not yield to death in weakness. He summoned death to serve his purpose. It is significant the inspired writer does not say, "He died!" but instead expressed reality: *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit* Luke 23: 46. That of course means, He actually breathed out his life to overtake the shallow breathing in of sinful and separated mankind. Thus clearly is made obvious the voluntary nature of his final act. *The Father loves me for this: that I lay down my life to take it up again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down freely. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again* John 10: 17, 18.

The Prophet of the Cross was speaking a language of security when He said, *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit* Luke 23: 46. We learn in the final moments of Christ's earthly life among us there is no security under any circumstances except we commit all into the hands of our heavenly Father. His greatest demonstration is the Cross.

The security of the hallow of God's open hand, with that of the Son nail-pierced, is the safety that every heart craves. It defies curses, crucifixions, crosses, pains and illnesses. For the believer it is a plus sign. Jesus announces this unchangeable fact as He breathes out his life for us.

The finish line

For man, the moment of death represents the ultimate loss of control. Until the moment He exhaled his final prayer, Jesus was actively carrying out the plan designed by the eternal Father for the salvation of humanity. As He crossed the finish line, Jesus entrusted himself to the Father for resurrection and restoration to his eternal state. He had previously emptied himself, *Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather he emptied himself and took the form of a slave being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross* Philippians 2: 7, 8. Thus He assumed full humanity and allowed the Father to insert him into the human race as a tiny,

helpless baby. He carried out all the implications of his mission for humanity, up to and including the cross. Now He entrusts himself to the Father once more.

Believers throughout history, led by Christ, by his example, have set the bar high for dying well. What better statement of confidence and faith can we declare at the moment of death or inform our families and friends long before we die, that we intend to commit our spirit to our heavenly Father's caring hands for safe keeping? A life well-lived means a death well-died, continuing in the blessing of his will beyond the last breath. Jesus confidently invaded death with that declaration. He belonged to the Father and there could be no doubt. *In the same way you must consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive for God in Christ Jesus* Romans 6: 8. *While we live we are responsible to the Lord, and when we die we die as his servants. Both in life and in death we belong to the Lord. That is why Christ died and came to life again, that he might be Lord of both the living and the dead* Romans 14: 8, 9. Can we who trust him for our salvation do any less?

When it is time

Even with his dying final breath, Jesus Christ remains king. The one who said no man could take his life from him died at the appointed time and in the appointed way. In the Old Covenant the literal statement for the moment when the Passover Lamb was to be sacrificed and killed was *...between the evenings* Numbers 9: 3, which according to Jewish tradition was somewhere between three in the afternoon and six in the evening. Jesus was crucified on the exact day that the Passover Lambs were being killed. *They did not enter the praetorium themselves, for they had to avoid ritual impurity if they were to eat the Passover supper* John 18: 28. At 3:00 PM, He cried his last, fulfilling his role as *...the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* John 1: 29.

Jesus died and was sacrificed according to the purposes of Divine Providence, not the whims or decrees of cowardly men. Just so, you and I will die, not according to the will of cancer, not according to the will of an erratic drunk cruising along the highway, nor according to the will of a missed or irregular heart-beat, not according to the will of a painful and messy disease. We will die under the good hand of God's providential care. We will pass through the curtain according to God's clock, not the time-table of random fate.

The depths of his love

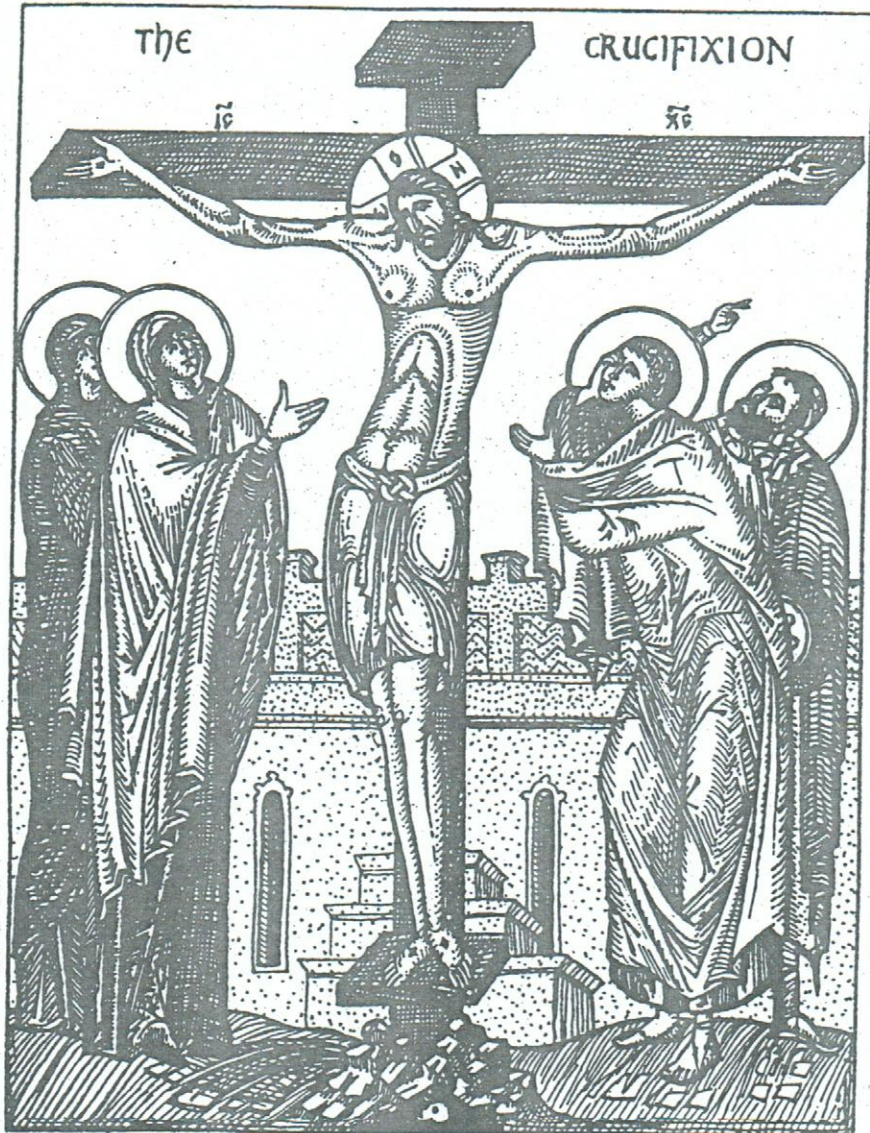
In south Texas, several hundred feet beneath the surface of the earth is a lake, an underground cavern of crystalline water known as the Edwards Aquifer. Much is known about this huge body of underground water, that its length is some 175 miles. Its layout is west to east, except under San Antonio where it runs north to south. But for all the facts scientists have been able to certify, there is an essential one we don't know. Its exact size is not known. The depth of the cavern? A mystery that continues to intrigue. The number of gallons of water it contains? Unmeasured. No one knows the amount of water the aquifer contains. The citizenry and population of the area use it, depend upon it, enjoy its blessings, would perish without it, but measure it? No one can!

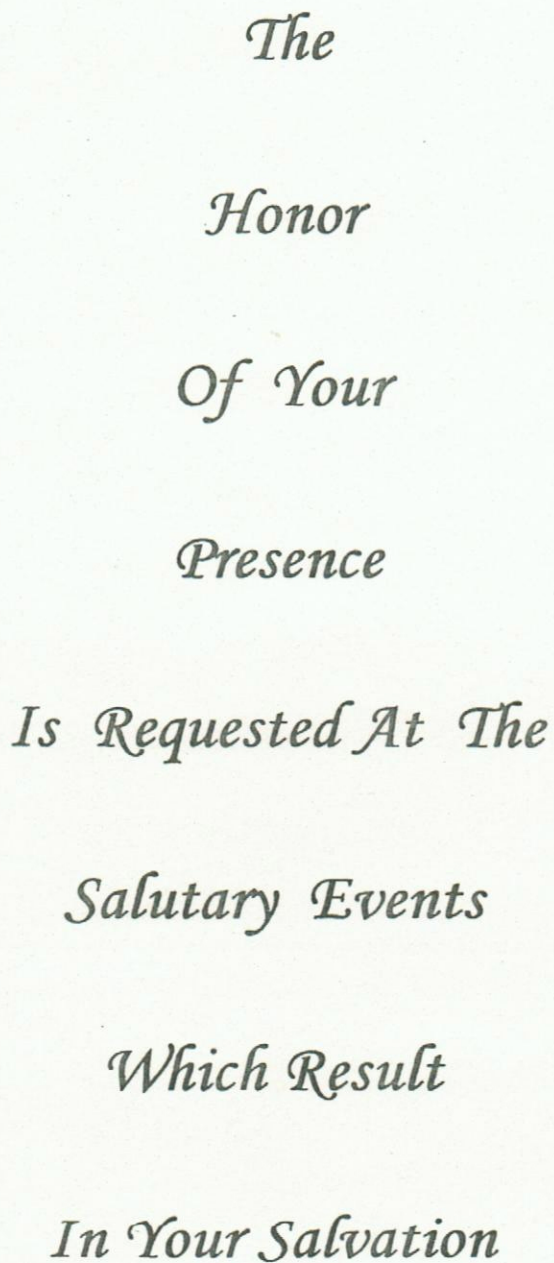
Who has similarly plumbed the depths of the love of our heavenly Father for sinful mankind? Only God has. "Want to see the size of my everlasting love?" He invites, "Ascend the winding path outside Jerusalem. Follow the dots of bloody dirt until you crest the hill. Before looking up, pause and hear me whisper 'This is how much I love you.'"

Whip-ripped muscles drape and festoon his back. Blood rivulets over his face. His eyes and lips are swollen shut. Pain rages like wildfire intensity. As He sinks to relieve the agony of his legs, his airway closes. At the edge of suffocation, He shoves pierced muscles against the spikes in his feet and inches up the cross, ripping and dislodging flesh in his back. He does this for hours. Painfully, up and down until his strength and our doubts are finally gone.

The love of the Father for his choice creation is beyond comprehension! Man's ability to grasp is so limited, we can only look in wonder and grateful thanksgiving!

Measure the love of God for us? Does He really love you? Behold the cross and discern your answer!





*The
Honor
Of Your
Presence
Is Requested At The
Salutary Events
Which Result
In Your Salvation*

Passion Week Service Schedule

Great and Holy Wednesday 7:30 PM Sacramental Mystery of Holy Anointing

Just as Christ on this day is anointed for burial, the Church lovingly anoints her faithful children for burial of imperfection and sinfulness... "...now consider yourselves dead to sin but alive for God in Jesus Christ" Romans 6: 11.

Great and Holy Thursday 7: 30 PM Mystical Supper celebrated at Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great with Vespers.

We join the Master at the altar table to hear His prayer: "I have given them the glory you gave me that they may be one, as we are one – I living in them, you living in me – so that their unity may be complete" John 17: 22, 23.

Great and Holy Friday 10:30 AM Reading of the Passion Gospels of Christ

We witness the Passion of the Lord as we accompany Him for the arrest, trials, the denials, the sentencing and final execution on the Cross. "Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted, but he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins, upon him was the chastisement that make us whole, by his stripes we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way, but the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all" Isaiah 53: 4 – 6.

7:30 PM Vespers of the Passion with Procession and Entombment of Holy Shroud followed by Vigil.

We prayerfully participate in the burial of our Saviour. "They took Jesus' Body and in accordance with Jewish burial custom bound it up in wrappings of cloth with perfumed oils" John 19: 40.

Great and Holy Saturday 9:00 AM Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great

We pray and mediate as the Lord's body lies in the tomb, effecting salvation of our souls by His entrance into the place of the righteous dead. "In the place where he had been

crucified there was a garden and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had ever been buried” John 19: 41.

7:30 PM Matins of the Resurrection with Procession followed by blessing of Paschal Foods.

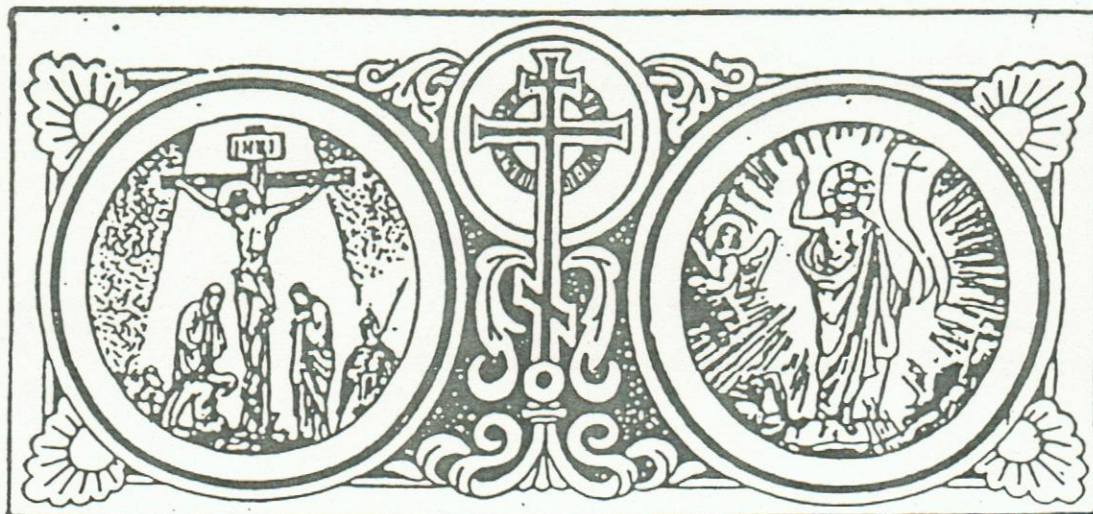
“I have seen the Lord...” John 20: 18. “You became a believer because you saw me” John 20: 29. “When he seated himself with them to eat, he took bread, pronounced the blessing, then broke the bread and began to distribute it to them” John 24: 30.

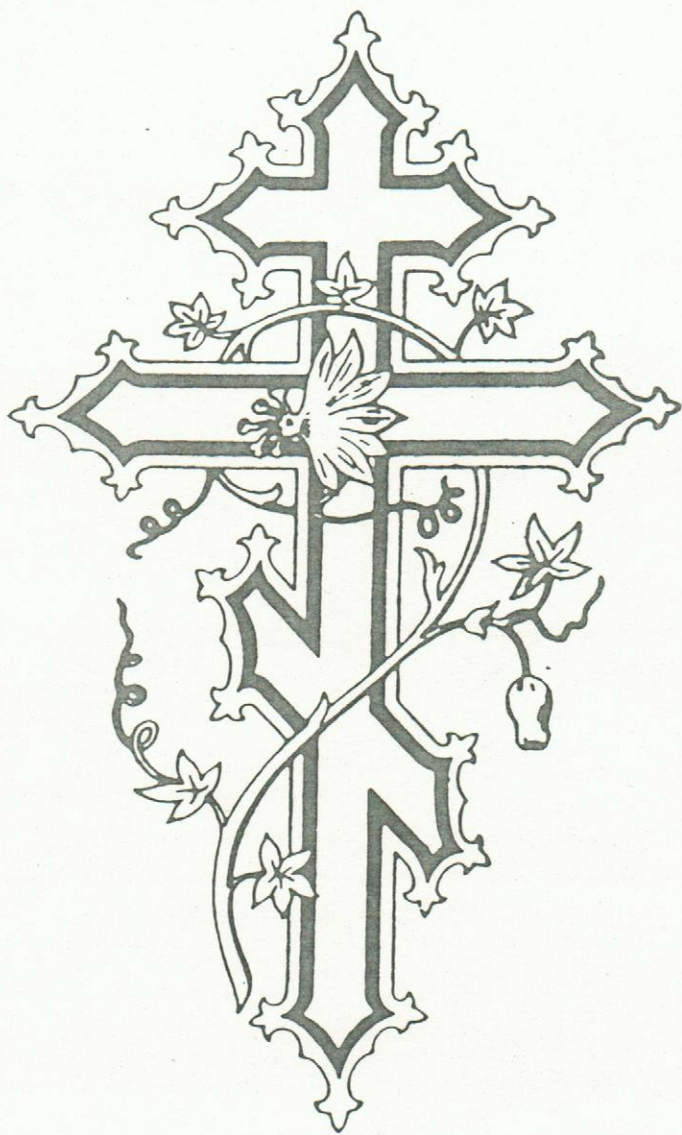
The Glorious Resurrection of our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ

9:30 AM Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom concluded with festal anointing and blessing of Paschal Foods.

“But these have been recorded to help you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, so that through this faith you may have life in his name” John 20: 30, 31.

Confessions are heard prior to and after all services so that by the feast of the radiant Resurrection we should all be prepared for triumphal celebration!





Dear Sojourner with Christ into the Passion and Resurrection:

This enclosed map covering the events of our Lord's last week in the flesh among us, will not show you how to get there, but will help you better understand the salutary events we celebrate liturgically in our parish church.

Accept it in the spirit it is offered. Take it, read it, study it and the accompanying Scripture citations that you be enriched in heart and soul.

Our prayer is that you come to a better understanding and appreciation of what occurred in the events leading to our redemption.

May we thus then be equipped to enjoy the triumphant victory over death which includes us as well!

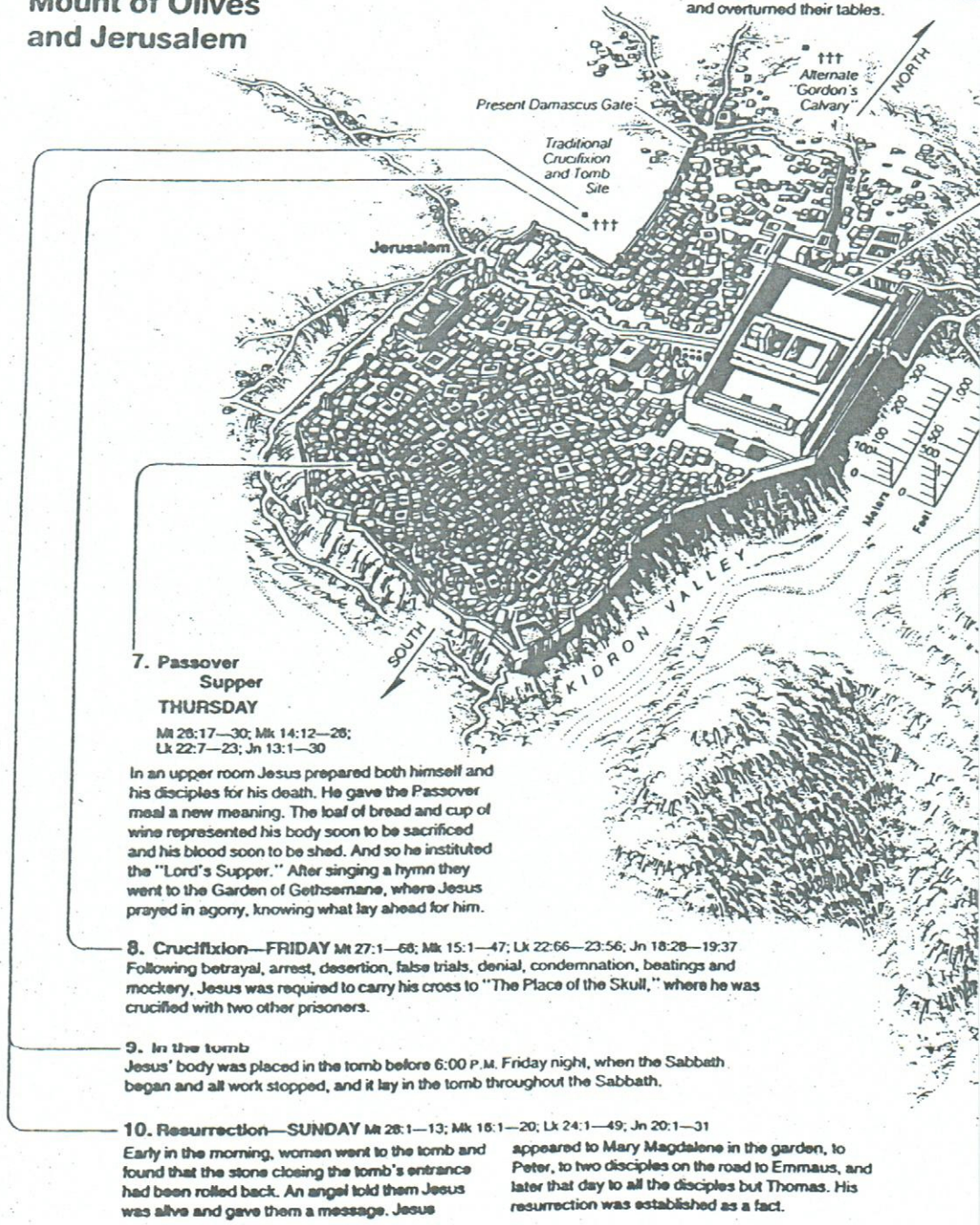
Passion Week

Bethany, the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem

4. Clearing of the temple MONDAY

Mt 21:10-17
Mk 11:15-18
Lk 19:45-48

The next day he returned to the temple and found the court of the Gentiles full of traders and money changers making a large profit as they gave out Jewish coins in exchange for "pagan" money. Jesus drove them out and overturned their tables.



7. Passover Supper THURSDAY

Mt 26:17-30; Mk 14:12-26;
Lk 22:7-23; Jn 13:1-30

In an upper room Jesus prepared both himself and his disciples for his death. He gave the Passover meal a new meaning. The loaf of bread and cup of wine represented his body soon to be sacrificed and his blood soon to be shed. And so he instituted the "Lord's Supper." After singing a hymn they went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed in agony, knowing what lay ahead for him.

8. Crucifixion—FRIDAY Mt 27:1-68; Mk 15:1-47; Lk 22:66-23:56; Jn 18:28-19:37

Following betrayal, arrest, desertion, false trials, denial, condemnation, beatings and mockery, Jesus was required to carry his cross to "The Place of the Skull," where he was crucified with two other prisoners.

9. In the tomb

Jesus' body was placed in the tomb before 6:00 P.M. Friday night, when the Sabbath began and all work stopped, and it lay in the tomb throughout the Sabbath.

10. Resurrection—SUNDAY Mt 28:1-13; Mk 16:1-20; Lk 24:1-49; Jn 20:1-31

Early in the morning, women went to the tomb and found that the stone closing the tomb's entrance had been rolled back. An angel told them Jesus was alive and gave them a message. Jesus

appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden, to Peter, to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and later that day to all the disciples but Thomas. His resurrection was established as a fact.

5. Day of controversy and parables

TUESDAY Mt 21:23—24:51;
Mk 11:27—13:37; Lk 20:1—21:36

IN JERUSALEM

Jesus evaded the traps set by the priests.

**ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES
OVERLOOKING JERUSALEM**
(Tuesday afternoon,
exact location unknown)

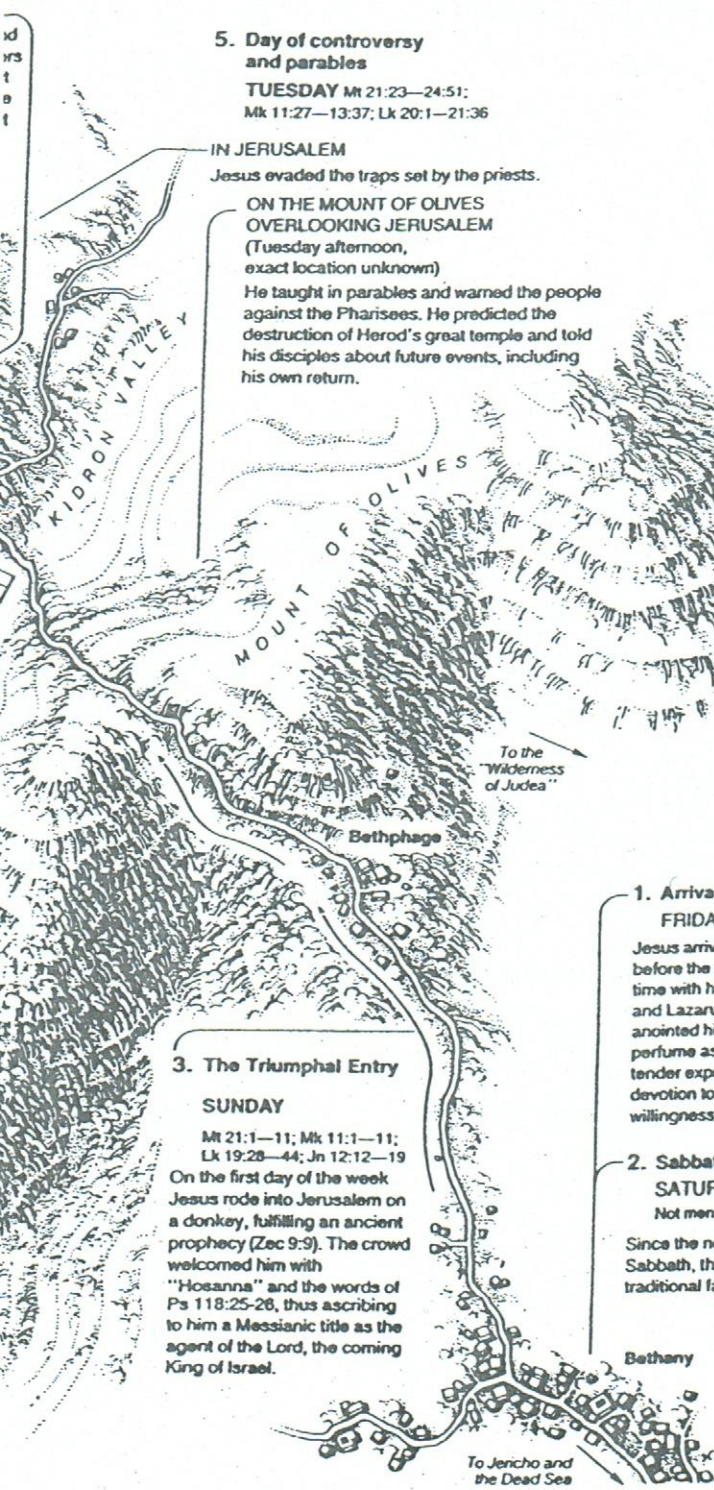
He taught in parables and warned the people against the Pharisees. He predicted the destruction of Herod's great temple and told his disciples about future events, including his own return.

6. Day of rest

WEDNESDAY

Not mentioned in the Gospels

The Scriptures do not mention this day, but the counting of the days (Mk 14:1; Jn 12:1) seems to indicate that there was another day concerning which the Gospels record nothing.



The Roman road climbed steeply to the crest of the Mount of Olives, affording a spectacular view of the Desert of Judea to the east and Jerusalem across the Kidron valley to the west.

3. The Triumphal Entry

SUNDAY

Mt 21:1—11; Mk 11:1—11;
Lk 19:28—44; Jn 12:12—19

On the first day of the week Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, fulfilling an ancient prophecy (Zec 9:9). The crowd welcomed him with "Hosanna" and the words of Ps 118:25-26, thus ascribing to him a Messianic title as the agent of the Lord, the coming King of Israel.

1. Arrival in Bethany

FRIDAY Jn 12:1

Jesus arrived in Bethany six days before the Passover to spend some time with his friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. While here, Mary anointed his feet with costly perfume as an act of humility. This tender expression indicated Mary's devotion to Jesus and her willingness to serve him.

2. Sabbath — day of rest

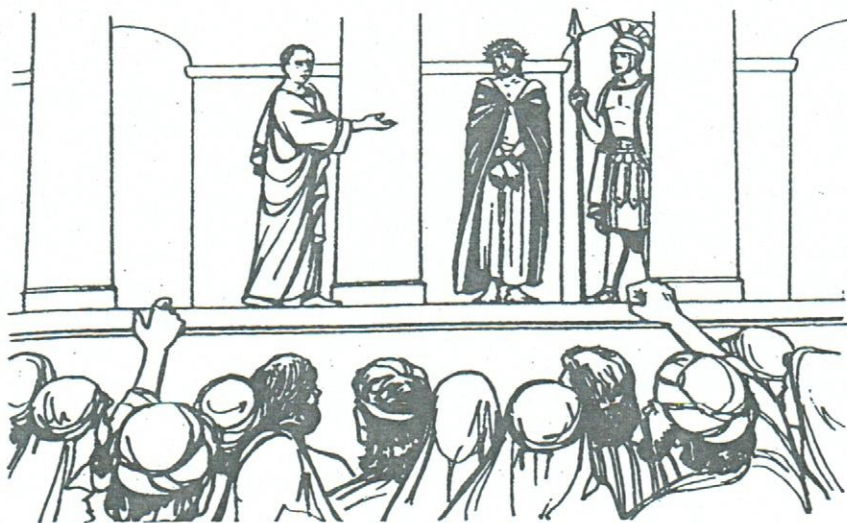
SATURDAY

Not mentioned in the Gospels

Since the next day was the Sabbath, the Lord spent the day in traditional fashion with his friends.

Bethany

To Jericho and
the Dead Sea



In the 53rd chapter of the Old Testament book that bears his name, Isaiah writes: *“He bears our sins and suffers for us, yet we considered Him to be in pain, suffering and ill-treatment. He was wounded because of our lawlessness and became sick because of our sins. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His bruise we are healed. Like sheep we have all gone astray. Man has gone astray in his way, and the Lord delivered Him over for our sins. Although He was mistreated, He opened not His mouth. He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb is silent before his shearers, so He opens not His mouth. In His humiliation His judgment was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth and because of the lawlessness of My people He was led to death.”*

Indeed, all that we will see our Lord endure this coming week - His betrayal by Judas, His arrest, His trial before the Sanhedrin and before Pilate, the beating and scourging He suffered, the ridicule and humiliation that was heaped upon Him and, finally, His death on the Cross were all brought about - as Isaiah foretold - because of our lawlessness and the fact that in our sinful, human nature, we have all gone astray. This week, Christ will suffer in silence and in humility. He will neither protest nor defend Himself. He will willingly go to His death “as a sheep led to the slaughter.” Why? Because it was so ordained by God - it was the key component for His plan to redeem mankind. For us to live eternally, Jesus had to die for our sins.

As we relive Christ’s Passion this week, may we be keenly aware of God’s great love for all of us. As we walk the “Way of the Cross” with our Savior, may we resolve to try with our entire being to rid our lives of the sins that made His suffering necessary.