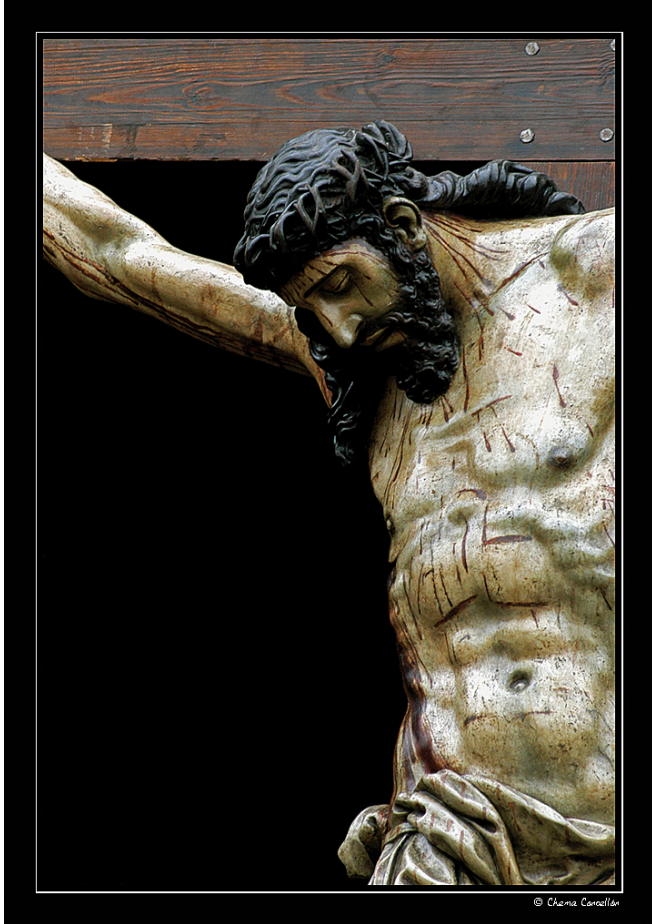


# Good Friday

*Feria Sexta  
in Passione Domini*



## The Great and Holy Friday

On this day we commemorate the sufferings of Christ: the mockery, the crown of thorns, the scourging, the nails, the thirst, the vinegar and gall, the cry of desolation, and all the Savior endured on the Cross.

The day of Christ's death is the day of sin. The sin which polluted God's creation from the breaking dawn of time reached its frightful climax on the hill of Golgotha. There, sin and evil, destruction and death came into their own. Ungodly men had Him nailed to the Cross, in order to destroy Him. However, His death condemned irrevocably the fallen world by revealing its true and abnormal nature.

In Christ, who is the New Adam, there is no sin. And, therefore, there is no death. He accepted death because He assumed the whole tragedy of our life. He chose to pour His life into death, in order to destroy it; and in order to break the hold of evil. His death is the final and ultimate revelation of His perfect obedience and love. He suffered for us the excruciating pain of absolute solitude and alienation - "*My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!*" (Mark 15:34). Then, He accepted the ultimate horror of death with the agonizing cry, "*It is finished*" (John 19:30). His cry was at one and the same time an indication that He was in control of His death and that His work of redemption was accomplished, finished, fulfilled. How strange! While our death is radical unfulfillment, His is total fulfillment.

The day of Christ's death has become our true birthday. Within the mystery of Christ dead and resurrected, death acquires positive value. Even if physical, biological death still appears to reign, it is no longer the final stage in a long destructive process. It has become the indispensable doorway, as well as the sure sign of our ultimate Pascha, our passage from death to life, rather than from life to death.

From the beginning the Church observed an annual commemoration of the decisive and crucial three days of sacred history, i.e., Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter. Friday and Saturday have been observed as days of deep sorrow and strict fast from Christian antiquity.

Friday and Saturday direct our attention to the trial, crucifixion, death and burial of Christ. We are placed within the awesome mystery of the extreme humility of our suffering God. Therefore, these days are at once days of deep gloom as well as watchful expectation. The Author of life is at work transforming death into life: "*Come, let us see our Life lying in the tomb, that he may give life to those that in their tombs lie dead*" (Sticheron of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom).

Liturgically, the profound and awesome event of the death and burial of God in the flesh is marked by a particular kind of silence, i.e. by the absence of a Eucharistic celebration. Good Friday and Holy Saturday are the only two days of the year when no Eucharistic assembly is held. However, before the twelfth century it was the custom to celebrate the Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts on Good Friday.

The divine services of Good Friday with the richness of their Scripture lessons, hymnography and vivid liturgical actions bring the passion of Christ and its cosmic significance into sharp focus. The hymns of the services on this day help us to see how the Church understands and celebrates the awesome mystery of Christ's passion and death.

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# *Improperia*

## Christ speaks to us from the Cross



**M**ankind, why have you deserted Me? Why do you turn away from the person that loves you? Why have you joined forces with my enemy? Remember that I descended from Heaven for your sake. Remember that I became incarnate for your sake. Remember that I was born of the Virgin Mary for your sake. Remember that I became a baby for your sake. Remember that I humbled Myself for your sake. Remember that I became poor for your sake.

Remember that I dwelt upon the earth for your sake. Remember that I was persecuted for your sake. Remember that I suffered verbal abuse and was disgraced. I was wounded, I was spit upon, I was slapped, I was ridiculed and I was unjustly accused just for you. Remember that for you I was numbered among the unjust. Remember it was for you that I suffered a disgraceful death. Remember it was for you that I was buried. I came down from the heavens in order to make it possible for you to be lifted up to the heavens. I became humble in order to raise you up. I became poor so that I could make you rich. I was disgraced in order to make you honorable. I was wounded in order to bring you back to life.

You sinned and I took your sins upon myself. You are guilty of sin and I was crucified. You are the debtor and I paid the price. You were condemned to death and I died for you. I was called to do these things out of my love and compassion for you. I could not endure to see you suffering and living in despair. And you have scorned my love. Instead of loving Me, you repaid Me with your hatred. Instead of loving Me, you loved sin. Instead of serving Me, you indulged serving your own passions. But what was it about Me that made you avoid Me? Why is it that you do not want to come to Me? Do you pursue that which is good for you? Whatever is

good in life I possess. Do you seek a blessed life? I offer it to you. Do you seek that which is beautiful? What is more beautiful than Me? Do you seek kindness? Who is more compassionate than the Son of God and the Virgin Mary? Do you seek that which is the most blessed thing in life? What is more blessed than the Kingdom of Heaven? Do you desire glory in life? Who is more glorious than Me in the world? Do you seek after riches? All the most profound riches in life are found in Me. Do you seek to acquire wisdom? I am the Wisdom of God. Do you seek a faithful friend in life? Who could possibly be friendlier than Me who gave His life for the sake of all of you? Are you looking for help in life? Who else in the world can help you like I can?

You seek healing from a doctor? Who else can heal you like I can? Are you looking for joy in life? Who else can give you the joy the way I can? Do you seek to find comfort in your pain? Who else will comfort you the way I can? Do you seek after tranquility? You will find tranquility for your soul in Me. Do you seek a sense of peace in your life? I am the peace that you seek for your soul. Do you seek after abundant life? I am the source of life. Do you seek after light that will light up your world? I am the Light of the world. Do you seek after truth? I am the truth. Do you seek to find the true path in life? I am the true path of life. Are you seeking a guide to lead you to heaven? I am the true guide. Why then do you not want to come to Me? Are you afraid to approach Me? Truly who else is more approachable than Me in life? Are you afraid to call upon Me for my help? In truth, when did I ever deny you anything when you asked for something in faith? Could it be that your sins are hindering you? Remember that I have died for the sins of the world. Are you worried about the multitude of your sins? My compassion is greater than all your sins. "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give your rest."



## At the Ninth Hour

*Kontakion of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*

When the thief beheld the Author of life hanging upon the Cross, he said: If Thou wert not God, Who art here crucified with us, then had the sun not veiled its rays, neither would the earth have shaken with trembling. But do Thou, Who sufferest for all men, remember me, O Lord, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom.

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit.*

In between two thieves was Thy Cross found to be the balance scale of righteousness; for while the one was led down to Hades by the heaviness of his blaspheming, the other was lightened of his sins, unto the knowledge of things divine. O Christ God, glory to Thee.

*Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.*

When she who bare the Lamb, the Shepherd and Savior of the world, beheld Him on the Cross, she said with tears: The world rejoiceth at receiving redemption, but my bowels burn as I see Thy crucifixion, which Thou endurest for all, O my Son and my God.

## It is finished!

How much can be said in just a few words! It is finished! It is done, it is accomplished...

There is no doubt that these words were also spoken by the enemies of the Lord, our Saviour, when they, returning from the terrible Golgotha, frequently repeated these words with Satanic joy: It is finished! We have finally reached the goal we desired so ardently: Jesus of Nazareth, our implacable accuser, is no longer alive; no longer will we hear His powerful, fiery words, so unbearable to our conscience, always placing us in a shameful situation before these ignorant people who are ready to deify Him, to follow Him into the mountains and the deserts, to hunger with Him, only to listen and listen to Him endlessly! Yes! He is no more: now we have nothing to fear, now we are complete masters, leaders of the people, and the people will follow us like mute and obedient animals, while gradually forgetting Him, this man of Galilee, and His new teaching will disperse like a cloud, like smoke in the wind, and we will quietly live as we wish... It is finished: it is over, He will no longer follow us like a stern shadow, like an implacable Judge!

Thus rejoiced the scribes and the Pharisees, the iniquitous Jewish high priests and the Sadducees, celebrating their victory over the Prophet from Galilee. But let us turn away from these proud members of the Jewish intelligentsia, depraved to the core, these

opponents of God and murderers of Christ. Let our thoughts and hearts turn to the sacred Golgotha. Here is being accomplished the great mystery of our salvation. Here is being offered the precious Sacrifice of atonement for the whole of mankind. Here the Lamb of God, Who has taken upon Himself the sins of the entire world, is dying on the cross. There He is, crying out in indescribable anguish of torment on the cross: "I thirst!" There He is, being offered vinegar to drink. And now we hear from His divine lips those majestic, those eternally significant words: "It is finished!" It is finished! – He cried out in the knowledge of having fulfilled the great mission entrusted to Him by the Heavenly Father: "I have finished, Father, the work which Thou hast given Me to accomplish!" It is finished! – He proclaimed triumphantly, celebrating victory over hell and death. It is finished!

Only this very morning, on this great day which is unique in the history of mankind, hell and death reigned powerfully over mankind, and now, in this sacred and mysterious hour when the Lord lowered His head, obedient to the will of the Heavenly Father, and gave up His spirit, hell is already moaning, death is already lying prostrated; the long-awaited hope of mankind has been fulfilled – the promised Reconciler of heaven and of sinful earth, of man begotten in iniquity and of the All-holy God has appeared and accomplished His mission; human frailty has been encompassed by divine love, and this love has canceled out all the debts of penitents, i.e. of sinners who thirst for salvation... Who, what mind – I am speaking not only of human mind, but of angelic also – what created mind is able to encompass and fathom the entire grandeur of our salvation, accomplished by the love of the Son of God?

O come and worship this holy sepulcher which conceals within itself the Source of our life, our eternal salvation, our boundless rapture! O come and worship this Source of life, the Life-giving Lord, and let us weep before Him, let us weep with tears of profound repentance of our sins, repentance without self-justification, in the simplicity of a loving heart weeping in the presence of a loving Father, Who loves us more tenderly than any mother on earth, Who nourishes us with His body and His blood, – let us weep with tears of firm and immutable repentance! Behold, all of this – these wounds from the nails, this pierced side, these wounds from the crown of thorns, this sepulcher – all of this is for the sake of man and his salvation! All of this is exclusively the work of God's love, which involved God's wisdom, and God's omnipotence, and all of God's perfection in this great work. And now this boundless Love speaks in our conscience: My people, My beloved vineyard! What more must I do for you? What have I not yet done? I waited for you to bring Me the fruits of good deeds, but you bring only the thorns of sin. How long

will this last? How long will I suffer you? The span of your life is moving along, moving towards its end, yet you continue to stagnate in your habitual and beloved sins, you stagnate in them and your heart becomes conjoined with them more and more, your souls becomes coarser and coarser, your conscience sleeps, becomes earthen, your spirit turns into flesh.. There is a limit to everything: there is a limit even to God's forbearance....

It is here, at our Savior's sepulcher, when our conscience is most easily awakened, when God's forbearance and love for us, sinners, is revealed in its vast entirety – that now is the time to cry over our sins...

Brethren! Who among you has not yet repented? Who has not yet united with the Lord in the most holy sacrament of Communion? Hasten to do this immediately, open your sinful wounds before this sacred sepulcher, and tomorrow you can approach the Lord's Chalice... The forthcoming bright feast of the Lord's Resurrection brings shining joy to a believing heart. Now is the favorable time, now is the day of salvation!

O most-merciful Lord, crucified and laid in the sepulcher for us! You have disposed the heart of the wise thief who was crucified with You towards repentance, You have touched the hearts of those who returned from the terrible Golgotha beating their breast! Soften also our hearts and open our eyes to see the whole sinful abyss into which we have fallen, extend to us Your saving hand from Your sepulcher, and before we come to our end, grant us that we may here and now shed bitter tears of heartfelt remorse, never to return to the path of sin and eternal damnation! Amen.



## Prayers from the Eastern Liturgy

Today He who hung the earth upon the waters is hung upon the Cross. He who is King of the angels is arrayed in a crown of thorns. He who wraps the heavens in clouds is wrapped in the purple of mockery. He who in Jordan set Adam free receives blows upon His face. The Bridegroom of the Church is transfixed with nails. The Son of the Virgin is pierced with a spear. We venerate Thy Passion, O Christ. Show us also Thy glorious Resurrection.

On the same day, O Lord, You granted the Robber Paradise. Now by the wood of the Cross, illumine me and save me.

## Facing Divine Silence

The last Gospel of Christ, the Gospel according to John, tells of the Lord's trial and of His suffering, death, and burial. Over the course of three short years the Lord preached daily. As the Apostle Mark says, He and His closest disciples did not have time to eat bread. He said much and He did much. The Evangelist John reckons that if everything He said and did were recorded, the world would not be able to contain the books written.

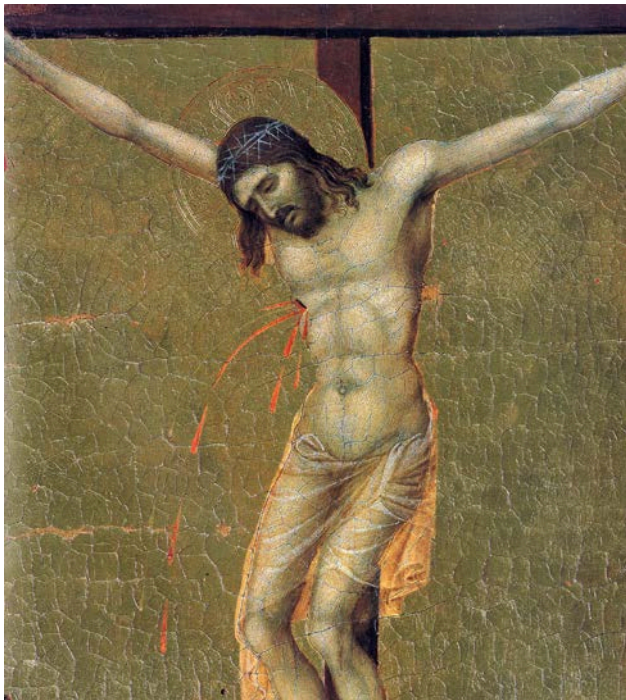
Yet, faced with unjust judges, Christ fell silent. Each of the Evangelists writes about this. He answered the high priest once and then said no more. When He was ridiculed, when He was beaten, when He was mocked – He remained silent. When He was led to Pilate, He again replied briefly before falling silent. Why did He – Who earlier had inspired faith and hope, setting alight the people – remain silent here?

Because He had already said everything. And because the unjust judges would have remained deaf to any of His words or to His defense speech. Therefore He remained silent. At only one time during the trial did He raise His voice in reply to a direct question: Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? To which He replied: I am. He then added: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven [Mark 14:61-62]. Having said this, He again fell silent. And when He was dying, those standing around the Cross heard only a few words from Him. He suffered and died in silence. How many bitter words He could have found for the ungrateful human race! But He was silent, for He was the God-Man, through Whom the Lord was revealed to us. He said everything, did everything, taught everything, opened the doors – and then was silent. He accepted outrage, ingratitude, scourging, and death.

Is it not the same in our lives? Sometimes it seems to us that the Lord is silent, that He is not responding to our suffering, sorrows, and mournful prayers. In fact, He is listening and does know; He is co-suffering with us now just as He was then, in the days of His suffering. Then, too, when faced with people blinded by envy, hatred, and anger, He was silent, for His heart was tormented for them: for their fall, for their sin, for their blindness. It would seem that today, too, He suffers for us silently. We call out to Him, yet we should not think that this Divine silence equals indifference, or that He, as we say, "cannot hear." He cannot but hear. It is simply that, as then, He has already told us everything. He has said more than can be fit into the world and into our hearts. He has showed us the road of life. Now He silently awaits the movement of the hearts and wills of each one of us.

And just as then, when He broke His silence and spoke about the Son of Man coming to judge the living and the dead, so now does the Lord say to us: “Yes, He is long-suffering; He silently suffers our sins, our baseness, our lack of faith, and all unworthiness – but not endlessly. A time will come when all will be weighed by God’s righteousness.” For us, the silence from the Cross is both a reproach and a call to true Christian life. The most important thing for us is encouragement, for we know that the Silent One on the Cross, the Silent One in heaven, is indeed the One Who saves us. He has neither forgotten us nor left us.

He alone is our only hope.



## Blood and water from His Side

by St. John Chrysostom

If we wish to understand the power of Christ’s blood, we should go back to the ancient account of its prefiguration in Egypt. “Sacrifice a lamb without blemish”, commanded Moses, “and sprinkle its blood on your doors”. If we were to ask him what he meant, and how the blood of an irrational beast could possibly save men endowed with reason, his answer would be that the saving power lies not in the blood itself, but in the fact that it is a sign of the Lord’s blood. In those days, when the destroying angel saw the blood on the doors he did not dare to enter, so how much less will the devil approach now when he sees, not that figurative blood on

the doors, but the true blood on the lips of believers, the doors of the temple of Christ.

If you desire further proof of the power of this blood, remember where it came from, how it ran down from the cross, flowing from the Master’s side. The gospel records that when Christ was dead, but still hung on the cross, a soldier came and pierced his side with a lance and immediately there poured out water and blood. Now the water was a symbol of baptism and the blood, of the holy Eucharist. The soldier pierced the Lord’s side, he breached the wall of the sacred temple, and I have found the treasure and made it my own. So also with the lamb: the Jews sacrificed the victim and I have been saved by it.

“There flowed from his side water and blood”. Beloved, do not pass over this mystery without thought; it has yet another hidden meaning, which I will explain to you. I said that water and blood symbolized baptism and the holy Eucharist. From these two sacraments the Church is born: from baptism, “the cleansing water that gives rebirth and renewal through the Holy Spirit”, and from the holy Eucharist. Since the symbols of baptism and the Eucharist flowed from his side, it was from his side that Christ fashioned the Church, as he had fashioned Eve from the side of Adam. Moses gives a hint of this when he tells the story of the first man and makes him exclaim: “Bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh!” As God then took a rib from Adam’s side to fashion a woman, so Christ has given us blood and water from his side to fashion the Church. God took the rib when Adam was in a deep sleep, and in the same way Christ gave us the blood and the water after his own death.

Do you understand, then, how Christ has united his bride to himself and what food he gives us all to eat? By one and the same food we are both brought into being and nourished. As a woman nourishes her child with her own blood and milk, so does Christ unceasingly nourish with his own blood those to whom he himself has given life.





From extra-Biblical writings, we learn that after the Resurrection, Joseph became an ardent and public member of the Christian community, helping to found the church at Lydda. It is believed that Joseph also traveled with the Apostle Philip to England, where he was instrumental in establishing the church at Glastonbury, which became a great place of pilgrimage. Other pious legends have persisted through many centuries and are celebrated in the English hymn “Jerusalem” and in the legend of the Glastonbury thorn (which grew from Joseph’s staff).

May Ss. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea pray for us, that we may be able to justly defend the Right and offer our riches to God, proclaiming the good news of Christ our Savior.

### Other characters

There are other characters in the story that we know even less about.

Malchus, the servant of the High Priest, was healed by Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane after Peter cut off his ear with a sword.

Simon of Cyrene (in modern Libya) was forced to carry the Cross for Jesus; he is noted as the father of Alexander and Rufus (who were probably known to the Church in Rome).

While we know little about them, we can be certain that the events of our Lord’s Passion touched them and changed their lives forever. As we meditate on the mighty acts of God in Holy Week, may we too be healed and transformed by all that we hear and see.

