

SYNAXARIA OF THE TRIODION

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GREAT FRIDAY

On Holy and Great Friday, we celebrate the Holy, saving, and dread Suffering of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ: the spittings, the slaps, the blows, the insults, the mockery, the purple robe, the reed, the sponge, the vinegar, the nails, and the lance; and, above all, the Cross and the death which He voluntarily accepted for our sake; in addition, we commemorate the saving confession, on the Cross, of the good Thief who was crucified with Him.

Verses to the Crucifixion

Thou art the living God, though Thou art dead upon the Tree,
O dead and naked Word of the living God.

Verses to the good Thief

The Thief opened the closed gates,
Using “Remember me” for a key.

Synaxarion

After our Lord, sold for thirty pieces of silver, was handed over by His friend and disciple, He was led first to Annas the high priest. He, for his part, sent Him to Caiaphas, where He was spat upon and struck on the face, mocked and ridiculed, and heard them saying to Him: “Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?” (St. Matthew 26:68). Thither came false witnesses, accusing Him of having said: “I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days” (St. Matthew 26:61); and of having said that He was the Son of God (St. Matthew 27:43). Thereupon, the high priest, unable to endure the alleged blasphemy, rent his robe (St. Matthew 26:65).

At daybreak, He was led to Pilate in the Prætorium, but they “went not in,” as they said, “lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the passover” (St. John 18:28). “Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man? They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee. Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your

law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death," (St. John 18:29-31), thereby goading Pilate into crucifying Christ. Pilate then asked Christ: "Art thou the King of the Jews?" (St. John 18:31). Christ admitted that He was a king, but an eternal one; for He said: "My kingdom is not of this world" (St. John 18:36).

Wishing to release Him, Pilate first told the Jews that he found no fault in Him at all. He then brought up the custom observed at the Passover, of releasing one of those in prison. They expressed a preference for Barabbas over Christ. Pilate, currying favor with the Jews, first had Jesus scourged, and then had Him led out to the soldiers, clad in a scarlet robe, with a crown of thorns around His head, and holding a reed in His right hand. He was derided by the soldiers, who said to Him: "Hail, King of the Jews!" (St. Matthew 27:29).

Gratuitously insulting the Jews, Pilate said again to them: "I have found no cause of death in him" (St. Luke 23:22). They replied: "But we will punish Him, for He calls Himself the Son of God" (cf. St. John 19:7). While these things were being said, Jesus remained silent. The crowds cried out to Pilate: "Crucify him, crucify him!" (St. John 19:6). For they wanted to put Him to an ignominious death in order to remove from their midst the good reputation that He had. As though showing respect for them, Pilate asked: "Shall I crucify your King?"; they replied: "We have no king but Cæsar" (St. John 19:15). Since they had gained nothing by saying that Christ was guilty of blasphemy, they mentioned Cæsar, in order at least in this way to satisfy their rage. For they said: "Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar" (St. John 19:12).

While this was going on, Pilate's wife, who had been terrified by fearful dreams, sent a message to him, saying: "Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things" during the night "because of him" (St. Matthew 27:19). Pilate washed his hands, supposedly absolving himself of any responsibility for Christ's blood." They cried out: "His blood be on us, and on our children" (St. Matthew 27:25); "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend" (St. John 19:12).

Fearing Cæsar, Pilate, although he was fully aware that Jesus was innocent, condemned Him to death by crucifixion and released Barabbas. On seeing this, Judas "cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself" (St. Matthew 27:5) from a tree. Later on, becoming distended, he burst asunder.

The soldiers mocked Him by smiting Him on the head with the reed, and laid the burden of the Cross on Him; then, pressing Simon of Cyrene into service, they forced him to carry the Cross. Reaching the Place of the Skull around the third hour, they crucified Christ. They suspended two thieves on either side of Him, so that He, too, might be reckoned a malefactor.

In their ignobility, the soldiers cast lots for His garments, including His seamless robe, behaving in an utterly insulting manner. And not only this,

but “they that passed by” jeered at Him on the Cross, saying: “Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, Save thyself, and come down from the cross” (St. Mark 15:29-30); and again: “He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him” (St. Matthew 27:42).

And yet, were they speaking the truth, they ought to have betaken themselves to Him without hesitation; for He was acknowledged to be King not only of Israel, but also of the entire world. Indeed, what else was the meaning of the sun becoming dark at the third hour, and in the middle of the day, at that, if not that His suffering should be manifest to all? What was the meaning of the earth quaking and the rocks being rent, if not to reprove the obduracy of the Jews? What was the meaning of the many bodies being resurrected and appearing, if not to confirm the general resurrection and the power of Him Who was suffering? What was the meaning of the veil of the Temple being rent in twain? It was as though the Temple itself were wroth at the suffering of Him Who was glorified therein, revealing those things that were previously invisible to most people.

Christ was crucified, then, at the third hour, as the Divine Mark says (St. Mark 15:25); from the sixth hour through the ninth, there was darkness (St. Mark 15:33). At that time, Longinos the centurion, beholding these extraordinary phenomena, and especially the darkening of the sun, exclaimed in a loud voice: “Truly this was the Son of God” (St. Matthew 27:54).

Now, one of the thieves reviled Jesus, whereas the other restrained him, gravely rebuking him, and confessed Christ to be the Son of God. The Savior, rewarding him for his faith, promised that he would dwell with Him in Paradise.

After all manner of abuse had been unleashed against the Lord, Pilate wrote a title over Him which said: “The King of the Jews” (St. John 19:19). When the Jews tried to prevent him from writing it thus, saying that it should read, “He said, I am King of the Jews” (St. John 19:21), Pilate retorted: “What I have written I have written” (St. John 19:22).

Then, after the Savior said, “I thirst” (St. John 19:28), they mingled hyssop and vinegar for Him. After saying, “It is finished,” He bowed His head and gave up the spirit (St. John 19:30).

After all had departed from the Cross, His Mother and her sister, Mary, the wife of Cleophas [and Mary Magdalene] stood by the Cross, and also John, His beloved Disciple.

Then the ungrateful Jews, not satisfied at seeing the bodies on the Cross, “because it was the Preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day (for that Sabbath day, being the day of the Passover, was an high day,) besought Pilate that legs” of the condemned men “might be broken” (St. John 19:31), so that death might overtake them more swiftly. The soldiers broke the legs of the other two, for they were still alive; “but when they came to Jesus, and saw that He was dead already” (St. John 19:33), they refrained from breaking His legs. One of the soldiers, cur-

rying favor with the ingrates, stretched forth a lance and pierced Christ in His right side, “and forthwith came there out blood and water” (St. John 19:34). Blood, since Christ was a man, and water, since He was more than man; or, blood, with a view to our participation in the Divine Gifts of the Eucharist, and water, with a view to Baptism; for this veritable twofold fountain constitutes the basis of our Mysteries.

The Divine John, who beheld these events, “bare record, and his record is true” (St. John 19:35), since he was present at all of the events and, having seen them, wrote them down. For, if he had written falsehoods, he would not have written things that appeared to bring dishonor on his Teacher. It is said that, being present at that time, he collected the Divine and most holy Blood from the life-giving side in a vessel.

When these things had been so preternaturally accomplished, since it was already in the evening, Joseph of Arimathæa, at first, like the rest, a secret disciple, went forth and with boldness approached Pilate, with whom he was on familiar terms, and requested the body of Jesus. Pilate allowed him to take it, which he did, bringing it down from the Cross with all reverence. When night fell, Nicodemus came, bearing a mixture of myrrh and aloes prepared for the occasion. Wrapping the body in a linen cloth, as it was customary for the Jews to do, they laid it nearby in Joseph’s tomb, which was hewn out of a rock and in which no one had previously been buried, lest when Christ arose His enemies should say that another had risen, and not Christ.

The Evangelist mentioned the mixture of myrrh and aloes, which are adhesive substances, in order that when men saw the linen cloth and the napkin left behind in the tomb, they might not suppose that He had been stolen. For how could this be, since there would not be sufficient time to detach those graveclothes that clung so closely to the body?

The God-bearing Fathers decreed that we should commemorate with contrition of heart and compunction all of these extraordinary events that occurred on the Friday, the Day of the Preparation.

It should be known that the Lord was crucified on the sixth day of the week, that is, Friday, on account of the fact that man was originally created on the sixth day. But in addition, He was suspended upon the Cross at the sixth hour of the day; for it was at this hour, it is said, that Adam stretched out his hands, touched the forbidden tree to eat of its fruit, and died. It was, indeed, fitting that he should be refashioned at the very same hour at which he suffered ruin. He was crucified in a garden (St. John 19:41), since it was in Paradise that Adam was deceived. The bitter drink which the Lord tasted on the Cross is an image of Adam’s tasting and the healing thereof. The slaps are an indication of our freedom to act. The spitting and the disrespectful behavior towards the Lord reveal the honor in which He held us. The crown of thorns symbolizes the warding off of the curse against us. The purple robe betokens the garments of skin and the royal vesture in which Christ has clothed us. The nails signify our complete unwillingness

to be moved towards sin. The Cross is a symbol of the tree in Paradise. The pierced side of the Lord is an image of Adam's rib, from which was fashioned Eve, through whom the transgression of God's commandment occurred. The lance averts the fiery sword, which guarded Paradise after the disobedience of our first parents. The water from the side of Christ is an image of Baptism. The blood and the reed were the means by which, as King, the Savior authorized in red ink our restoration to our ancient homeland.

It is said that the skull of Adam lay on the spot where Christ, the Head of all, was crucified; it was baptized, therefore, by the blood of Christ that flowed from Him. It is called "the Place of the Skull" because during the Flood the skull of Adam was disgorged and was seen as a portent. Out of respect for our Forefather, Solomon covered it up with very many stones. Hence, that place was named Lithostrotos, "a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha" (St. John 19:13). Some of the most eminent of the Holy Fathers say that, according to Tradition, Adam was buried there by an Angel.

Therefore, where the Fall occurred, there the heavenly Eagle alighted, Christ, the eternal King, the New Adam, healing through the Tree of the Cross the old Adam, who fell through a tree.

By Thy preternatural and infinite compassion towards us, O Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.

