

SYNAXARIA OF THE TRIODION

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GREAT SATURDAY

On Holy and Great Saturday, we celebrate the burial of the Divine Body of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ and His Descent into Hades, whereby our race was recalled from corruption and passed over to eternal life.

Verses

In vain do ye keep watch over the tomb, O guards;
For the grave shall not hold fast Him Who is Life itself.

Synaxarion

The Holy Lenten periods are superior in honor to all of the other days of the year; this Holy and Great Lent, in turn, is superior to the other Lents; again, Great Week is superior to the rest of the Fast; and this Great and Holy Saturday is yet greater than Great Week.

It is called Great Week, not because its days and hours are longer, but because great and preternatural wonders and the extraordinary works of our Savior were accomplished therein, and especially today.

Having endured His life-giving Sufferings during this week for our salvation, on this day the Lord neither did nor suffered anything on earth, but lay bodily in the Tomb, from the evening of Friday, while His all-holy soul descended to Hades in order to raise from there our forefathers together with Himself. However, just as in the original creation of the world God made all of the other creatures in six days and created man, the most important of all His creations, on the last day, to wit, the sixth, and subsequently rested from all His works on the seventh day and hallowed this day, calling it the Sabbath, which means “rest”; so also in this case, in the creation of the noetic world, after making all things very well, again on the sixth day He recreated man, who had fallen into corruption, renewing him through His life-giving Cross and voluntary death, and on this seventh day rested completely from His works, sleeping the sleep of death that is life-giving and salvific.

The Word of God, then, descended with His flesh into the Tomb; but He descended into Hades with His immaculate and Divine soul, which was separated from His body after death and which He entrusted into the hands

of His Father, exclaiming with a loud voice, according to Luke the Evangelist: “Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit” (St. Luke 23:46). To His Father He also He offered His own blood, without being asked to do so, thereby becoming a ransom for us.

Now, the Lord’s soul was not held fast in Hades as were the souls of the other Holy ones. How could that be? For it was in no way affected by the ancestral curse, as were they.

Our Lord Jesus Christ dwelt in the Tomb bodily and with His Divinity, which was utterly united to His flesh. He was with the Thief in Paradise, and in Hades, as we have said, with His deified soul; in a preternatural manner He was also seated with the Father and the Holy Spirit, being God uncircumscribed. He was present everywhere, His Divinity not suffering at all in the Tomb, just as it did not suffer at all upon the Cross. The Lord’s body underwent corruption, though only in the sense that His soul was separated from His body, but in no way did it suffer decay, that is, the dissolution of the flesh and the destruction of its members.

After Joseph had taken the Lord’s body down from the Cross, he buried it in a new tomb, which was “nigh at hand” (St. John 19:42) in the garden wherein He was crucified, placing an exceedingly large stone at the entrance thereof. For their part, the Jews went to Pilate on the Friday, and said to him: “Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first” (St. Matthew 27:63-64). They were given permission to do just as they had requested, and this they did.

Now, if Christ had been a deceiver, you slanderers, why did you pay any heed to His words when He was alive? For it is admitted by all that He died. When did He ever say to the Jews, “I shall arise after three days”? Perhaps they inferred this from the example of Jonah. At any rate, O ungrateful ones, if the tomb was made secure, He would not be stolen. Oh, how you failed to realize, in your ingratitude, that by whatever you did for your own sake, you were acting against yourselves. At the command of Pilate, you secured the tomb with a sure seal and with a detachment of soldiers (St. Matthew 27:66).

Hades is henceforth contorted and dazed, perceiving that it is under attack from a mightier power. Thus, in a short time, through its unjust swallowing of Christ, the most steadfast Corner Stone, it will spew forth those whom it had devoured and deposited in its belly from all ages past.

By Thine ineffable condescension, O Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.



