

## Preparing for Passion Week

*In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.*

### Aim

- ✠ Understand the importance of Passion Week
- ✠ How to enjoy and benefit from the most spiritual week of the year

### Key Verse

*“With Christ I have been crucified; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20)*

### Lesson

From material by HH Pope Shenouda III

### **The Importance of Passion Week**

Passion Week or the Holy Pascha (Passover) is the most important period in the year and the richest in spirituality. It is a week full of Holy memories of the most crucial stage of salvation and the outstanding chapter in the story of sacrifice.

The church chose for this week certain readings from both the Old and the New Testaments, which reflect the most passionate feelings that explain God's relation with man. The church also chose some deep hymns and spiritual contemplation to suit the occasion. In the early church, our fathers the Saints used to receive this week with respect and reverence, and act in great humility.

While fasting, they abstained from eating any sweet food like honey or jam, as it is not appropriate to eat sweets while commemorating God's suffering for our sake. Some did not cook during this week, as a matter of devotion, as cooking would distract them from worship. Some never ate anything except bread and salt. Those who were physically capable abstained from Friday night until Easter Sunday.

As a sign of devotion during this week, women did not put on make-up or wear jewelry. People devoted all their time to worship; they gathered in churches for prayer and contemplation.

The Great Emperor **Theodosius** was one of the Christian kings and rulers who ordered all government houses and businesses to cease work in order to enable people to concentrate on worship. They allowed even the prisoners to go to church and join in the ceremonies of this great week, hoping that it would help them reform. Christian masters also used to relieve their slaves from work during the Pascha Week to enable them to worship the Lord like their masters, without any discrimination. Therefore, both masters and slaves were able to worship God and appreciate the effectiveness and depth of this week.

## Preparing for Passion Week

**How do we enjoy the most spiritual week of the year?**

### 1. Our behavior inside and outside church

It is very noticeable that many people during Passion Week act very differently inside church than they do outside church. Inside church... black curtains, sad hymns, solemn readings, and complete concentration on the suffering of Christ. However, outside of church, we often laugh, joke around, socialize, think and talk about many worldly issues. We lose all the spiritual depth that we gained inside church. Let us concentrate our thoughts, conversations, and meditations around the events of Holy Week and the passion of our Saviour.

### 2. Retreat

During our regular fasting days, we put the words of the Bible before us, "Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly..." (Joel 1: 14) How much more then should we apply this commandment during Holy Week? This week should be characterised by solitude and retreat with God by staying away from idle discussions, various means of entertainment and pleasures. Reserve your time for God and to spiritual activities worthy of this week.

### 3. Follow the steps of Christ

Meditate on the events of the week one by one, from Palm Sunday when Christ refused the worldly kingdom and the Jews gave up their hopes in Him, until they crucified and buried Him. On Palm Sunday, ask yourself, is Jesus Christ, King and Lord over everything in my life? Do I, like Christ, turn down worldly glory for spiritual and eternal glory? Moreover, during the "general funeral" afterwards, consider yourself attending your own funeral (because during this week the church will not hold funeral services). In addition, when the church denounces Judas' betrayal with a kiss on the eve of Wednesday's Pascha, ask yourself in prayer, "How often, O Lord, have I betrayed you?" "How many times have I told you words of love in prayers, while my actions show the opposite and my heart is far away from you?"

### 4. Share in the fellowship of His suffering

St. Paul said, "**That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being conformed to His death**" (Philippians 3:10) Can we give ourselves an exercise this week to share in the fellowship of His suffering and be conformed to His death? Can we follow Him in His suffering and ascend with Him to the Cross? Can we say with St. Paul "**With Christ I have been crucified; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me**" (Gal. 2:20) Therefore, in order for Christ to live in us, we have to carry our cross and follow Him. If you have a cross in your life, do not complain about it, but rather rejoice in it and bear it for Christ's sake. "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him but to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29)

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### 5. Asceticism

Whoever puts the suffering of Christ before Him will not take any pleasure in eating, drinking or pampering the body. Nevertheless, in order to succeed in pursuing asceticism, we must satisfy our souls with spiritual food so that it may thrive and overcome physical hunger.

### 6. Spiritual readings

Spiritual readings are also food for the soul. The church organises for us a treasure of appropriate readings for each day of Holy Week. This consists of Gospel readings, Old Testament prophecies that correspond to the events of each day, spiritual explanations and sermons of the church fathers and on Holy Saturday (Apocalypse night); the church reads the entire book of Revelation.

### 7. Hymns

The hymns of Passion Week are moving and full of spiritual depth. In addition, hymns, like reading, preserve thoughts from wandering and guide us in a spiritual direction.

### 8. Prayer

Since the prayers of the Agpia are not used during Holy Week, we are to substitute personal prayers in their place. This is in addition to the intensive prayers of the church asking the Lord, who bore the sins of the world and died for us, to forgive and have mercy upon us according to His great mercy.

### Homework / Memory Objectives:

- 1) Write a few things you can do to prepare yourself for Passion Week.
- 2) Name 3 things that are different in church during Passion Week.
- 3) Why do we have General Funeral Prayers before Passion Week?
- 4) When are we not allowed to kiss each other during Passion Week, and why?
- 5) What was the last thing Jesus Christ said on the Cross? Find the verse and reference!

**CHALLENGE QUESTION:** *“Pek-ethronos”* is a very special hymn. When is it said during the Passion Week? How many times during the whole year is it used?

**Glory is to God, forever. Amen.**