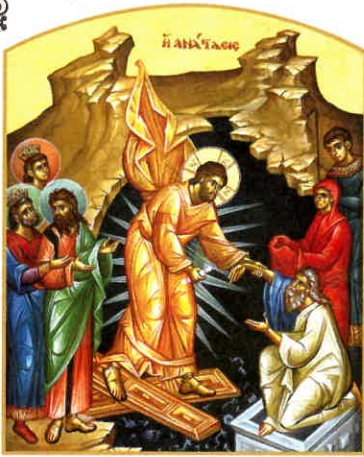


Christ is Risen!



Bless the Lord all you peoples and exalt Him to all ages.

[Hymn of Three Youths]

Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall have an inheritance among the nations. [Hymn before Gospel]

[Vesperal Liturgy of Holy Saturday – celebrated in the morning]

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The two hymns above are probably not well known to many in our parish community. That's because they are sung during the Vesperal Liturgy on the morning of Holy Saturday. Unfortunately, many, if not most people, have not made this worship service part of their Holy Week discipline. Yet, this service and especially these hymns and the rubrics that accompany them are some of the most beautiful during Holy Week.

The first short hymn is refrain or chorus interspersed amongst the numerous (39) verses of the Hymn attributed to the Three Youths who refused to worship the golden image/idol set up by King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon (see Daniel 3:1-57). This hymn is inserted into the middle of Daniel 3 and is only found in the Septuagint translations of the Old Testament (the official OT version for Orthodox Christians). It is called Deutero-Canona or Apocrypha. They would only worship the Lord and God of Israel. After the King threatened to torture and kill them in the fire, the three youths responded with one of my favorite passages in all the Bible.

¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

Their trust in their God, even if he would not save them from the fire is beyond admirable. The King followed through on His threat and they remained in the fire, yet unburned and unharmed. God did preserve them. In the midst of the fire they sang their song. We hear:

²³Now the king's servants who threw them in kept stoking the furnace with naphtha, pitch, tow, and brushwood. ²⁴And the flames poured out above the furnace forty-nine cubits, ²⁵and spread out and burned those Chaldeans who were caught near the furnace. ²⁶But the angel of the Lord came down into the furnace to be with Azariah and his companions, and drove the fiery flame out of the furnace, ²⁷and made the inside of the furnace as though a moist wind

Continued on reverse

Truly He is Risen!

were whistling through it. The fire did not touch them at all and caused them no pain or distress. ²⁸Then the three with one voice praised and glorified and blessed God in the furnace:

During the Liturgy, when we arrive at this part of the reading, we begin to sing/chant the 39 verses of with the refrain in the first tone. It is very powerful and moving. The Three Youths Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego (these were their Babylonian names, but their Jewish names were Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah) are great examples for all Orthodox Christians.

How often are we presented with choices, implicit or explicit, to praise and glorify false gods? Every worship service presents us with a choice. Do I go and bow down to the Holy Trinity or do I stay away because of some idol whatever it may be? An idol is anything that becomes more important than God at any given time. Often, people are more willing to endure the fiery consequences of their sin, rather than submitting themselves to the fiery love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Some are willing to forsake faith in Christ to avoid the fiery punishment of earthly powers who coerce us to worship false gods.

The second hymn is sung between the Epistle and Gospel readings of the Vespertine Liturgy. In fact, it is chanted instead of the normal “Alleluia’s” that precede the Gospel. Ever wonder how the church sanctuary is filled with flower petals and bay leaves for the midnight Resurrection service? It happens on Saturday morning during the singing/chanting of this hymn. The priest processes throughout the sanctuary throwing the petals and leaves as a sign of victory. This was a common tradition in biblical times when the military returned victorious from battle. It is the equivalent of the modern ticker-tape parade filled with confetti. One of the best cinematic examples of this is portrayed in one of the last scenes of the film “Gladiator.” We of course, our welcoming our victor over sin and death, Jesus Christ, after He descends from the Cross into Hades to release the prisoners therein.

I encourage everyone to avail themselves of this beautiful Vespertine Liturgy and all the Holy Week services (see the schedule enclosed). Let us freely submit ourselves in them to the fiery love of God’s warm embrace. I also encourage everyone to make a special offering at this time to support the ministries of our parish community to preach the gospel, teach the commandments, to heal the sick and brokenhearted (see the envelope enclosed).

Καλό Πάσχα και Καλή Ανάσταση

Blessed Pascha and Resurrection 2019!



✠ Rev. Fr. Richard Demetrius Andrews