



Holy Week: Selections from Bridegroom Matins

Each year we are invited once again to traverse the sacred days of the fast and come to that Week of all weeks – Holy Week. We are invited by the Church to take pause and reorient our crazy hectic schedule around “church time.” Every year we are guided through this rich, profound and beautiful cycle of services where we participate in Christ’s final days. If we pause enough we enter into the deep silence of the fear, isolation, sadness of the coming crucifixion of our Lord. Though the one Subject is Christ Himself, we come to find that it is us as well who become a vital component to these services. As we are remembering these events – Judas, the crowds, the Virgins awaiting the bridegroom, the harlot who anointed Christ’s feet – we begin to see that we are just like these persons. We are the Virgins who are not ready for the bridegroom. We are Judas who so often are willing to sell Christ for the sake of our worldly gain, we are the disciples who deny our Lord, and we are the crowds who boldly proclaim “crucify him!”

The first three days of Holy Week are referred to as “the end”. We have just laid our palm branches down into the silence of Christ’s final days. Darkness and judgment are the theme for the first three days. This is centered around the the Gospel reading from Great and Holy Tuesday found in Matt. 24:36 – 26:2. This is the parable of the ten virgins. Here we are urged not to be like the five foolish virgins who were not prepared for the coming of the bridegroom. The troparion hymn sung on these three days:

Behold the bridegroom comes at midnight, and blessed is the servant whom he shall find watching; and again, unworthy is the servant whom He shall find heedless.

Beware, therefore, O my soul, do not be weighed down with sleep, lest you be given over to death, and lest you be shut out of the Kingdom.

But rouse yourself, crying: “Holy! Holy! Holy! art Thou, O our God. Through the Theotokos have mercy on us!”

Also another hymn:

Thy bridal chamber I see adorned, O my Savior, but I have no wedding garment that I may enter. O Giver of Light, enlighten the vesture of my soul, and save me.



As we enter into Holy Week we are overwhelmed with the sense that we have nothing to offer our Lord and that we have wasted our life and are asleep and that we have missed the coming of the bridegroom. It is only through the grace and mercy of our Lord's voluntary Passion that we are made worthy to enter. We hear this echoed on Monday evening:

How shall I, the unworthy one, appear in the splendor of Thy saints?

For if I dare enter Thy bridal chamber with them my garments will betray me: they are unfit for a wedding.

The angels will cast me out in chains.

Cleans the filth of my soul, O Lord, and save me in Thy love for mankind.

O Christ the Bridegroom, my soul has slumbered in laziness.

I have no lamp aflame with virtues.

Like the foolish virgins I wander aimlessly when it is time for work.

But do not close Thy compassionate heart to me, O Master.

Rouse me, shake off my heavy sleep.

Lead me with the wise virgins into the bridal chamber, that I may hear the pure voice of those that feast and cry unceasingly: O Lord, glory to Thee!

It is important to let the full weight of these services permeate us. Let the heavy truth of seeing ourselves as we truly are lead us to glorify Christ's passion and cause us to cry out as we will on Holy Friday, "show us also Thy Glorious resurrection!"