

TROPARION

(Tone 8)

While the glorious disciples were enlightened at the Last Supper by the washing of their feet, the impious Judas was blinded by his greediness for money and delivered You, the righteous Judge, to lawless judges. See, O lover of riches, how for money's sake he hanged himself; therefore flee from greediness which made him to betray his Master. Being benevolent towards all men, O Lord, glory be to You.



THE FIFTEENTH ANTIPHON

(Tone 3)

Your cross, O Lord, is life and resurrection to Your people; therefore, putting all our trust in it, we sing to You: Our crucified God, have mercy on us.



CONCLUDING TROPARION

(Tone 4)

You have redeemed us from the legitimate curse by Your precious blood; being nailed to the cross and pierced by the spear, You poured forth immortality for all men. Our Savior, glory be to You.



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"STRASTI" SERVICES OF THE HOLY PASSION OF OUR LORD according to the BYZANTINE TRADITION

SERVICES OF THE HOLY PASSION OF OUR LORD

"Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps."

(I Pet. 2:21.)

Good Friday, known to the primitive Church as the *Pasch of Crucifixion*, was since apostolic times, dedicated to the solemn commemoration of the passion of our Lord. By the word "passion", we understand all the sufferings endured by our divine Savior, from the Last Supper until His death on the cross, including His burial.

The sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ constitute the main part of the economy of salvation, and are meticulously described by all four Evangelists, with some variant details. Divided into twelve parts, these gospel readings become a special feature of the services called *The Holy Passion of Our Lord*.

The readings of the twelve passion gospels are set up into the frame of Good Friday Matins. However, according to ancient practice, these services are celebrated in the evening of Holy Thursday, when the sufferings of our Lord actually started.

1.

The cradle of the liturgical celebrations in the Byzantine Rite was Jerusalem, where the faithful began to celebrate certain mysteries of our salvation in their proper setting. With the coming of numerous pilgrims, the holy places mentioned in the Scriptures were singled out with some outstanding sanctuaries, where many impressive liturgical celebrations were initiated, and were then gradually accepted by other Churches of the East. Likewise the solemn celebration of the Holy Passion of our Lord started in Jerusalem, being inspired by the All-Night Vigil of Good Friday.

Inspired by the vivid passion narratives of the Evangelists, the faithful used to spend the night before Good Friday "watching and praying" (Mt. 26:41), as they followed our Lord on His way to the crucifixion in a candle-light procession. In time the pilgrims joined the local Christians in their vigil procession, visiting all the holy places in and around the city which were mentioned in the passion narratives.

When the procession reached a particular place (station), marked by a church or chapel, the people used to sing some "psalms and spiritual songs" (Col. 3:16), while the clergy read the related gospel story and recited certain prayers. The procession then moved to the next holy place mentioned in the Gospel. This was the beginning of the present Services of the Holy Passion, as described by the famous Spanish pilgrim, the nun Egeria, at the end of the fourth century.

2.

As we are told by the Evangelists, the sufferings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ started on Holy Thursday night. After the Last Supper our Lord left the Cenacle and, together with His disciples, entered into the garden of Gethsemany, located at the foot of the Mount of Olives. For this reason, the passion vigil in Jerusalem also started on the eve of Good Friday. The ancient *Typikon of Jerusalem*, dating to the ninth century, prescribes that the vigil should start at two o'clock at night, that is at eight o'clock in the evening according to our time.

In the fourth century, the Christians had already built a beautiful church on the site of the Cenacle where Our Lord instituted the Holy Eucharist. This church was known as the Basilica of Holy Sion, mentioned in our liturgical hymns as *the Mother of All Churches*, as testified to by St. Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem (d. 638). Therefore, the vigil procession started in the Basilica of Sion with the reading of the rather lengthy Farewell Discourse of our Lord, which He delivered just before leaving the

cenacle, as recorded by St. John Evangelist (Jn. 13:31-18:1).

As the deacon finished the reading with the words: "When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples across the Cedron Valley, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered," the candle-light procession started to move toward the Garden of Gethsemany, at the foot of Mount of Olives. By the time the procession returned to the city, after making five stations on the mountain, it was already dawn and time to celebrate the morning services, the Matins (cf. *Byzantine Leaflet Series 1984*, No. 31).

Back in the city, the procession then stopped in a small chapel, known as *the Church Before the Cross*. It marked the praetorium of Pilate, where our Lord was brought by the Jewish leaders on Friday morning, as indicated by the Evangelist: "When it was morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death. They bound Him, led Him away, and handed Him over to Pilate, the governor." (Mt. 27:1-2).

During the morning services the gospel, describing the trial and condemnation of Jesus, was read. It ended with the words: "Then he (Pilate) handed Him over to them to be crucified." (Jn. 19:16). Hence the name of the place, *Before the Cross*, before the cross was placed on the shoulders of our Lord on His way to Calvary.

3.

Before the dismissal the bishop invited all the faithful to return to the same place at two o'clock (i.e. 8:00 a.m. our time) to follow our Lord on His Way of the Cross to Calvary, where a magnificent *Basilica of the Martyrion* was built (cf. *Byz. Leaflet Series 1977*, No. 8). As the procession reached the basilica, *the Third* (9:00 a.m.), *the Sixth* (noon time), and *the Ninth Hour* (3:00 p.m.) was celebrated with the gospel readings about our Lord's crucifixion, agony, and dying on the cross. Those three readings were later transferred from the Hours to the Passion Services

as the eighth, the ninth and the tenth Passion Gospels.

The eleventh Passion Gospel, describing burial of our Lord, was initially read at Vespers of Holy Friday, celebrated immediately after the Ninth Hour in the adjoining *Basilica of the Resurrection*, constructed in the fourth century over the tomb of our Savior.

Originally, then, there were only six Passion Gospels, as indicated by the fourth century pilgrim, the nun Egeria, describing the all-night vigil procession. The seventh Gospel, introduced by a Prokimenon, was the proper gospel reading of the Matins. As the Matins services became enriched with the new liturgical compositions, especially those of St. Cosmas of Maiuma (d. about 760), the additional Passion Gospels were inserted. Thus, according to the later Typika, by the thirteenth century eleven Passion Gospels were read in order to equal the number of the eleven Resurrectional Gospels. However, sometime before the sixteenth century the twelfth Passion Gospel, describing the placing of the guards at our Lord's tomb (Mt. 27:62-66), was added for no other reason than "to round up the number." The twelfth gospel reading was borrowed from the Matins services of Holy Saturday, where it properly belongs.

4.

The Passion Services, as we celebrate them today, are composed of two separate parts: 1) the ancient All-Night Vigil, and 2) the morning services of Matins.

The pristine *All-Night Vigil* now unfolds in the frame of the first six Passion Gospels, tied together by the antiphons. The first gospel reading is preceded by a moving troparion, **While the glorious disciples** (see Back Cover), which takes us directly into the Cenacle (the Holy Sion Church), where the candle-light procession originally had started. As the vigil procession was moving from one station (church) to another, the antiphons, excerpts from the Psalms, were chanted by the people. The gospel

reading at the station was usually preceded by a prayer and appropriate hymn.

Following the pristine custom, three antiphons are sung between the first six Passion Gospels even till today, which are followed by a small ektenia (prayer) and so called sessional hymn. Altogether there are fifteen such antiphons and five sessional hymns, connecting the first six Passion Gospels into one liturgical whole, constituting the ancient All-Night Vigil Services.

5.

With the singing of **the Beatitudes** the second part of the Passion Services, the proper Matins, begins. The Matins also contain six Passion Gospels, inserted throughout the services, namely: 1) after the Prokimenon, 2) after the Psalm 51 (50), 3) after the triodion of the Canon, 4) after the Sticheras of Praise, 5) after the Doxology, and 6) after the Aposticha. Finally, the concluding troparion, **You have redeemed us** (see Back Cover), summarizes the meaning of Christ's sufferings in the work of our salvation.

The twelve Passion Gospels, as prescribed by the Typikon, are as follows:

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| 1) John 13:31-18:1 | 7) Matthew 27:33-54 |
| 2) John 18:1-28 | 8) Luke 23:32-49 |
| 3) Matthew 26:57-75 | 9) John 19:25-37 |
| 4) John 18:28-19:16 | 10) Mark 15:43-47 |
| 5) Matthew 27:3-32 | 11) John 19:38-42 |
| 6) Mark 15:16-32 | 12) Matthew 27:62-66 |

Perhaps nothing is so characteristic of the Holy Passion Services as the versicles chanted before and after the reading of the Gospel as we make a deep bow. Before the gospel reading we sing: **Glory to Your Passion, O Lord**; and after: **Glory to Your long-suffering, O Lord!**

The Services of the Holy Passion may be long, but they are very dramatic and deeply touching to the heart. Our prayerful participation in these services, which so vividly describe the mysteries of our salva-

tion, fills our heart with compassion and love of our Savior, and restores our moral strength. Strengthened by our Lord's passion, we then eagerly look toward the Pasch of Resurrection as the assurance of our salvation. Already at the end of the first part of the services we humbly cry out:

"We venerate Your Passion, O Christ, Show us also Your glorious Resurrection!"

(cf. *The 15th Antiphon*)

On the Cover: With the kiss Judas betrays his Master.