

**From Betrayal to Faith: the Themes and Theology of Holy Week in Byzantine
Orthodoxy.**

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Holy Week, or as it is often called after the Russian and Greek linguistic uses, Great Week, stands at the centre of Orthodoxy. In this week we commemorate Christ's suffering and death, and we celebrate with joy his resurrection from the dead and the fact that we are, in Christ, called to share His risen life. An Orthodox person will probably have a fair mental picture of what happens during this week, and will probably think of these services as having always been as they are today. I am going to try and show that the services have a history, and explore what that history may show as regards changing shades of belief and theology. I should also point out at this point that my reason for stressing 'Byzantine' Orthodoxy in my title is not a sign that I am going to concentrate only on ancient Constantinople, let alone the Orthodox church life of modern Istanbul. I simply wish to indicate that my subject is (a) common to all of Eastern Orthodoxy, and (b) I am not going to touch on the services and customs of the Oriental Orthodox churches, such as the Syrians or Armenians.

Holy Week as celebrated today.

I would first like to briefly explain the structure and services of Holy Week as they are now celebrated. This is partly for the benefit of those who have never experienced them, and partly to offer an *aide memoire* to those who are familiar with them, but may not immediately be able to bring to mind a lot of detail.

The liturgical books reckon the week as starting with Great and Holy Monday, but I would like to include some consideration of Palm Sunday as well, since this will be important for our reflections on the themes and theology of the week. Palm Sunday has much the same shape of services as normal, except that palms, olive branches, or sprigs of pussy willow are blessed at Matins. Unlike the Roman tradition that moves sharply from the joy of Christ's entry into Jerusalem to the austere reading of the Passion, traditionally that of St Matthew, the Byzantine Liturgy of the day is full of the triumphal entry. If Vespers are celebrated, then that service will often immediately follow the Palm Sunday Liturgy. This is the first service of Holy Week proper, and halfway through, the bright vestments of the Entry into Jerusalem give way to the dark or even black vestments of Holy Week.

For most Orthodox, and especially the Greeks, Holy Week really starts on Palm Sunday evening with the first of the so-called Bridegroom services. The Troparion at Matins after the opening six psalms begins with the words: "Ἴδού ο νυμφίος ἐρχεται - Behold the bridegroom comes in the middle of the night¹." It is usual, especially in

¹ The services for Holy Week are most completely and conveniently to be found in *The Lenten Triodion* tr. Kallistos Ware and Mother Mary (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1978), beginning on page 489.

Greek churches to exhibit for veneration in the centre of the church, an icon based on the western *ecce homo*, man of sufferings image. This is known as the icon of the Bridegroom, ο νυμφίος, and is very much the image popularly associated with the first half of Holy Week.

The next morning, Liturgy of the Presanctified is served. This is Vespers with communion from the sacramental species reserved on Sunday. This reversed pattern of Matins in the evening and Vespers in the morning is normal in this week. Especially in Russian churches, the Minor Hours of the day are read before the Vespers, Monday to Wednesday mornings. This service does not seem to be so popular with some Greeks, one popular service book in Greek and English only supplies the evening Matins service of the Bridegroom for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday².

Wednesday night should see the celebration of the anticipated Matins of Holy Thursday, but in some places this has been replaced by the service of Anointing, which, not actually being an original part of the Holy Week round, will not be dealt with here. This service has a different Troparion suited to the day, but the *Exaposteilarion*, much later in the service, still uses the Bridegroom imagery "I see thy bridal chamber adorned, O my Saviour". On the morning of Holy Thursday there is Vespers and the Liturgy of St Basil, commemorating the last supper and Judas' betrayal of Jesus - recalled especially in the hymn "Of thy mystical supper", repeated several times.

² *Greek Orthodox Holy Week and Easter Services*, ed. George L. Papadeas (Daytona Beach, Fl.: Patmos Press, 1989).

On Holy Thursday night there is a long celebration of the Matins of Good Friday, which includes the reading of twelve Gospel passages. Even in parishes this service usually lasts at least three hours, and in Greek parishes it is often customary to set up a crucifix in the centre of the church about halfway through the service. On the morning of Good Friday the Royal Hours, First, Third, Sixth and Ninth, together with the service called *Typika* are served. In Greek churches, these will be immediately followed by Vespers, which in Russian churches are delayed until the afternoon. Vespers includes the reading of the Passion, towards the end of which, Greek clergy take down the figure of Christ from the cross in the centre of the church, and 'bury' it in the sanctuary. At the end of Vespers the *Epitaphios* or *Plashchenitza* is solemnly brought to the centre of the church in order to be venerated. This is a large embroidered icon of Christ lying in the tomb, and is common to all Orthodox.

Having commemorated the passion and death of Christ, the Holy Saturday Matins on Friday night is, as it were, a service of lamentation at His tomb. A very popular service, it is followed by an outdoor procession of the *Epitaphios*. By now Greek clergy are usually wearing white vestments, and one priest described this to me as a 'joyful funeral procession'. Clergy in Slav countries continue to wear black or dark vestments.

On Holy Saturday morning there is Vespers, at which are read fifteen Old Testament lessons, combined with the Liturgy of St Basil. Russian clergy change to bright vestments just before the Gospel, which is of the resurrection. This is the ancient Easter Vigil, and is somewhat marginalised in modern Orthodox consciousness, except

that it is the traditional time for many people to make their Easter, or just annual, Communion. From this service until the Midnight office, relays of people may read the Acts of the Apostles. At the end of the midnight office, the *Epitaphios* is removed from the centre and placed on the altar where it will remain until the eve of Ascension. At Midnight the clergy go in procession and proclaim the resurrection before the doors of the church, there then follows the joyful hymn of praise of Christ's resurrection, the Easter Matins, climaxing in the exchange of the Easter kiss, and the Paschal Liturgy of St John Chrysostom. One could add other things, but we have, hopefully, outlined the general shape and thrust of the modern Orthodox Holy Week and Easter services.

The Origins of the Christian Paschal Feast

The early history of the Christian celebration of the resurrection is complex and frequently controverted³. It is however, important for our purposes to know that there is broad scholarly acceptance of the hypothesis that our annual resurrection celebration of Easter Sunday is, at least as far as the annual celebration is concerned, derived from Asian Christians known as Quartodecimans, from their observance of a Christian version of the Passover on the 14 Nisan⁴. The regular weekly Sunday celebration of the Resurrection and this annual Christian Passover eventually became the common observance of Easter, its reckoning being definitively separated from the Jewish Passover by the legislation of the Council of Nicaea in 325. The Quartodeciman and early Easter Sunday celebration appears to have been an integrated celebration of the passion as well as the resurrection, this is reflected in the scope of the famous sermon of Melito of Sardis

³ The best modern overview is Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (New York: Pueblo, 1986).

(+ c.180), "*On Pascha*⁵". The main celebration appears to have been overnight, Saturday to Sunday, and culminated in the celebration of the Eucharist. In other words, it was what we now refer to as the Paschal Vigil.

The next major component of Holy Week is supplied by early Christian fasting practices. The well-known and much discussed Greek document known as the *Didache*, dating from perhaps the later years of the first century of our era, and of possibly Syrian or Palestinian provenance, requires a twice weekly fast. "Let your fasts not [take place] with [those of] the wicked. They fast on Monday and Thursday; you, though, should fast on Wednesday and Friday⁶." (The reference to the 'wicked' is to the Jews and may be said to be culturally conditioned!) The early Christian practice of fasting twice a week was, especially in the development of Holy Week, closely connected with the biblical prediction that when the Bridegroom was taken away, then would the disciples fast (Mt. 9.15, Mk. 2.20 and Lk. 5.35). The period of the Bridegroom's 'absence' until the resurrection appears, in some places at least in the second century, as being reckoned to begin on Wednesday with the arrest. The passion and death follow on Friday, and the Resurrection on Sunday at the Paschal Vigil, finishing at about 3 a.m.⁷. At this early stage any commemoration of the Last Supper would have to be on Tuesday, if the arrest was recalled on Wednesday morning. We might also note that references to the Bridegroom here are to his being taken away, rather than to his coming in the middle of

⁴ Ibid., 13-27.

⁵ Edited by Stuart G. Hall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

⁶ Kurt Niederwimmer (ed) *The Didache* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, *Hermeneia* series, 1998), 131.

⁷ Karl Gerlach, *The Antenicene Pascha* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 216-9, 221 and 230.

the night, though that too may refer to resurrection in the night and therefore looking to the new Paschal Feast.

Beyond this picture of an integrated celebration of the Christian Pascha at an overnight vigil, preceded by some days of fasting, including the Saturday when Easter moves to Sunday⁸, we cannot at present re-construct any other observances that might have existed before the fourth century. This writer suspects that an early development may have been to move the passion and death of Christ to the Sunday prior to the Easter resurrection celebration. However this is at best a guess at present, since only the Roman tradition and others that derive from it⁹ have the custom of reading the Passion on Palm Sunday.

The Influence of Jerusalem

One of the most valuable pieces of evidence that we possess for the liturgical celebration of Holy Week and Easter is the "Pilgrimage of Egeria". This lively account by a late fourth century, probably Spanish, pilgrim to the Holy Land gives us our first clear evidence for Holy Week services that divide the commemorations up among the days of the week in an historicizing way¹⁰. Egeria gives us our first account of a Palm Sunday procession, though interestingly, it follows a service on the Sunday afternoon, celebrated at a church on the Mount of Olives. The procession going back to the city,

⁸ Talley, *op.cit.*, 27-31.

⁹ E.g., the Anglican and Lutheran.

¹⁰ Critical edition, M. Maraval and M. Diaz y Diaz, *Égérie, Journal du Voyage* (Sources Chrétiennes 296, Paris: 1996), English translation and edition, (ed) John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels* (3rd edition, Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1999).

and culminating at the Basilica of the Resurrection with a later than usual *Lucernare* or Vespers¹¹.

Egeria says that services are held as usual each day, but beginning with Monday, she emphasises "...readings appropriate to the place and the day and prayers in between¹²." On Tuesday the bishop reads Matthew 24.1-26.2, an eschatological discourse with parables calling for watchfulness, that is placed in that part of the Gospel that follows the entry into Jerusalem. This takes place at the Mount of Olives as mentioned in the Gospel¹³. On Wednesday the characteristic gospel is Matthew 26.3-16 in which, after witnessing a woman anointing Jesus, Judas decides to betray him¹⁴. On Thursday the morning services are as normal, there appears to be a liturgy in the afternoon, and then, in the evening, another and all receive communion, after which they go for a light meal at home. They return in order to spend the night in a peripatetic vigil that moves from place to place associated with Christ's last night with his disciples¹⁵. In each place appropriate gospel readings, prayers and hymns are used; the farewell discourse of John 13.16-18.1, in this case set at the Mount of Olives. Then to the place of Christ's Ascension, and from it to the site of the agony in the garden with Matthew 26.31-56, which leads to the arrest. By early morning the procession has arrived at the Praetorium and the Gospel tells of the encounter with Pilate, and Jesus' handing over to be crucified (John 18.28 - 19.16)¹⁶.

¹¹ (For greater convenience the references will be to Wilkinson's edition) op.cit., # 30.1 - 30.4.

¹² Ibid., # 32.1.

¹³ Ibid., # 33.2.

¹⁴ Ibid., # 34.

The principal Good Friday observance centred on the veneration of the cross before midday, and then an afternoon series of readings and so on, from 12 until 3, culminating with John's account of Jesus' death. Later, at the Basilica of the Resurrection, where of course was the Holy Sepulchre, Matthew's account of Christ's burial (Mt. 27.57-61) brings the public services of the day to an end¹⁷. On the Saturday there are only the normal services until 3 in the afternoon. From then begins the preparation for the Paschal Vigil, and the Vigil itself at the Great Church, baptisms going on during this and then the newly baptized being introduced into the worshipping assembly. There appears to be a Liturgy, and then a procession to the place of Resurrection for the reading of the Resurrection Gospel and a further Liturgy - thus was the Paschal night spent in rejoicing¹⁸. This last set of observances are dealt with only cursorily, probably because Egeria and her correspondents knew a very similar pattern, so there was little to describe that was not already known.

We are fortunate that we not only possess Egeria's invaluable description of these services of the Great Week, but that we also have, in the old Armenian Lectionary, corroboration of much of what she told us. This fifth century document gives us references to the readings of Holy Week, which in the case of the Gospels certainly confirms what Egeria has said¹⁹. For Monday the lectionary supplies Matthew 20.17-28, in which Jesus foretells his passion and says that he came not to be served but to serve. This has no indication of a particular geographical location. We might also note that

¹⁵ Ibid., # 35.1-4.

¹⁶ Ibid., # 36.1-4.

¹⁷ Ibid., # 37.

¹⁸ Ibid., # 38.

Holy Thursday has two gospel readings for different times, both are account of the last supper, Matthew 26.17-30 and Mark 14.1-26, the latter including the anointing and betrayal by Judas as well. From this source we learn that the Epistle on this day was I Cor. 11.23-32, which not only gives Paul's version of the institution of the Supper but also his warning about eating and drinking unworthily. We must note that this theme of warning and the salutary example of Judas always add a darker tone to the accounts of the institution of the supper, that has become the central service of Christianity.

The next testimony to the Jerusalem Holy Week is the Georgian Lectionary tradition that represents this liturgy from the middle of the fifth to the end of the eighth century²⁰. Further development has taken place, but the main value of looking at this document is to see how the structure of readings and psalms has been further fleshed out with poetic compositions²¹. Monday's hymns appear to be a general call to witness the passion, Tuesday's speak of the justice of God, Wednesday's stress the figure of Judas as the great lesson of impenitence. Thursday very importantly makes use of the well-known hymn 'Of thy mystical supper', already characteristic of the Byzantine celebration of this day²². There are also directions for a foot-washing ceremony to follow communion, something not mentioned by either Egeria or the Armenian lectionary, but found here and in the Typicon of the Anastasis basilica dating from some time between the ninth and

¹⁹ Edited by A. Renoux as *Le codex Arménien de Jérusalem 121*, in *Patrologia Orientalis XXXV.1 & XXXVI.2* (Turnhout: 1969 and 1971). See also Table in Wilkinson, *op.cit.*, 184-8.

²⁰ Michel Tarchnischvili (ed.), *Le Grand Lectionnaire de l'Église de Jérusalem* (Louvain: CSCO 9, 10, 13 and 14, 1959-1960).

²¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 14, 98-108.

²² *Ibid.*, 100.

early eleventh centuries²³. The series of Gospel lessons for the vigil over Thursday night to Friday morning continued to grow into the twelve we know today and appear to be continued as a stational observance until at least the tenth century, and perhaps until the destruction wrought by the Caliph al-Hakim in 1009²⁴.

By the time of the *Anastasis Typicon* the Jerusalem liturgy of Holy Week commenced with the entry into Jerusalem now being commemorated with the procession in the morning. Each of the four gospels is now read in full each day after Matins on Monday to Thursday. The sometimes ignored custom of a second eucharist on Holy Thursday has been restored, the Thursday night vigil procession is slightly shorter in distance traveled, and, although much re-arrangement of the Paschal Vigil has taken place, there is both that eucharistic celebration and another in the early morning²⁵. Alterations have taken place, largely in the direction of historicizing the services, ensuring that as strict a chronology as possible of the events of the passion is adhered to. Although the processional and stational liturgy is still observed, this is no longer the dominant feature that it was.

Holy Week in ancient Constantinople.

When we turn to the evidence we have of what was happening in Constantinople at this time, we first have to recognise that most of our sources are from a much later date than the pilgrimage of Egeria or the Armenian lectionary. The earliest source that gives

²³ S. Janeras, *Le Vendredi-Saint dans la Tradition Liturgique Byzantine* (Rome: *Studia Anselmiana* 99, 1988), 139-144.

²⁴ John Baldovin *The Urban Character of Christian Worship* (Rome: OCA 228, 1987), 99-100.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

us much detail is a Typicon which appears to be a late tenth century copy of a mid tenth century source, Ms Hagios Stavros 40²⁶. The Palm Sunday liturgy conveys a great sense of rejoicing at the entry of Christ into Jerusalem; Philippians 4.4-9 "Rejoice...the Lord is at hand" and John 12.1-18's account of anointing and entry are the readings that are still heard on this day. This contrasts with Jerusalem's Matthaean entry into that city to cleanse the Temple.

The shape of the Monday to Thursday observances is based around three main services, Matins, the Tersext in the late morning, and Vespers. These followed their normal pattern but the Typicon indicates certain hymns that were proper to those services. One no longer used is a Troparion accompanying Psalm 50 at Matins. Monday's sings of Christ accepting his passion in the flesh, Tuesday's is an extended version of the confession of the good thief on the cross, Wednesday's sings of the plotting sanhedrin, and Thursday's of betrayal. Tersext had the Troparia and prophetic readings now associated with the sixth hour Monday to Wednesday and the First on Thursday²⁷. The Troparia: "With a contrite heart", "To those who sin beyond measure", "Today the evil Sanhedrin" and "Thou wast struck on the face" may be said to have a similar overall thrust.

The Tersext reading from Ezekiel (Jeremiah on Thursday), and those of Vespers from Exodus and Job, were described by Mateos as part of a Lenten continuous reading

²⁶ Edited by Juan Mateos, *Le Tipicon de la Grande Église* Tome II, *Le cycle des fêtes mobiles* (Rome: OCA 166, 1963), Holy Week, pages 64-91. Dating discussed in Baldovin, *op.cit.*, 190-1.

²⁷ *Lenten Triodion*, 517-557.

of scripture²⁸. Actually, throughout Lent the readings are from Isaiah, Genesis and Proverbs, and Ezekiel, Exodus and Job are not necessarily the next in order and do seem to be chosen for other reasons. The Ezekiel readings are accounts of the prophet's opening vision and his call to prophesy to a rebellious house, this last followed by Jeremiah's lamenting his ill-treatment for prophesying. The Exodus readings tell of slavery in Egypt, the birth of Moses, his mission to Pharaoh, and his preparation to meet God in the wilderness. The Job lessons tell of God's allowing his temptation and his steadfast faithfulness in the face of tribulation, jumping on Thursday to God speaking out of the wilderness in chapter 38, asking the rhetorical questions as to how mortals can understand God. The Gospel readings, at Vespers only, warn of the coming tribulation (Mt. 24.3-35), tell of signs and parables of judgement (Mt. 24.36-26.2), and relate Jesus' anointing for death (Mt. 26.6-16).

It is clear that there is not the same interest in choosing lessons and chants that connect with specific places and times, in fact there is no real interest in historicizing the celebrations of Holy Week. This Constantinopolitan scheme is more in the form of an extended meditation on the meaning of the passion spread over the whole week. Monday is a general introduction, Tuesday is about being called to prophesy, perhaps seeing the good thief as an image of another suffering prophet alongside Christ. Wednesday deepens the theme of undeserved suffering freely accepted as the will of God, and Thursday faces the prophet with the mystery of the betrayal of those closest to him - only in this wilderness is he to meet God.

²⁸ *Le Tipicon...*, op.cit., 75, fn. 4.

Holy Thursday is especially interesting. The troparion on Psalm 50 was "Today the King of Life is delivered to the Jews to be crucified", that at Tersext, "Thou wast struck on the face". We have already noted the Jeremiah reading. In the evening after the Vespers psalmody came the ceremony of the washing of the feet, carried out by the Patriarch. The entry had a reduced ceremonial, and when the Patriarch had gone to his throne in the apse, there followed the readings from Exodus and Job. In the first preparations are made for God to reveal himself in the wilderness, while in the second, God speaks out of the whirlwind. A third reading from Isaiah 50.4-11 contains assurance that the prophet's vindication is at hand. The general theme of preparation to meet God and the assurance of His presence to those who suffer for their faithfulness now appears to be interrupted by the historical remembrance of the institution of the Eucharist in I Corinthians 11.23-32. However we have already noted that, as in Jerusalem, the supper that is to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes is eaten and drunk for judgement by the unworthy. There is a warning here that fits better with the theme of preparation to meet the Holy God.

The Gospel of the day is completely unlike what we have seen in Jerusalem. It is a harmony of the gospels of Matthew, John and Luke which combines in a single discourse the anointing, the betrayal, the washing of feet, the last Supper, the agony in the garden, the arrest, the trial, Peter's denial and condemnation to death. Clearly the concern is not to see Holy Thursday as simply devoted to an historical commemoration of the Last Supper. But that is not to belittle the importance of the supper, as the cherubic hymn was, and still is, replaced by the following hymn.

"At thy mystical supper, Son of God, today receive me as a communicant: for I will not give Thee a kiss like Judas; but as the thief confess Thee; Remember me, Lord, when thou comest in Thy Kingdom²⁹."

A hymn, as we have already seen, that was adopted by Jerusalem.

"At thy mystical supper" was and continues to be sung at the entry of the eucharistic gifts, and as the Communion and Post-Communion chants. I have quoted it in full as it seems to sum up so many of the themes we have encountered in this Holy Thursday celebration. This is far from being a triumphalistic feast of the institution of the mystery of communion. This supper is clearly in the context of the passion, and equally clearly has a powerful eschatological message that the presence of God is a judging presence coming in power, even though that power now appears to be being defeated by the powers of this world. The Hagios Stavros typicon also notes that the chrism is to be consecrated at this Liturgy of St Basil, but we will not go into that here. There is a clear need to consecrate chrism for the baptismal rites some time before the Holy Saturday baptisms, and we could be reading in too much if we were to try and connect this too closely to the Holy Thursday themes.

The Hagios Stavros typicon prescribes a *Pannychnis* or vigil service that has the 12 gospels of the Jerusalem processional vigil. This may well be a later influence from the Holy Land, as another typicon manuscript from Patmos does not mention these readings at all³⁰.

²⁹ *Lenten Triodion*, 559.

³⁰ *Le Tipicon*, op.cit., 77-79, and 79 fn 1.

The ancient Byzantine Good Friday was again rather different from Jerusalem. At Matins we find the troparion, "Today the veil of the Temple is rent", now part of the First Royal Hour (to which we shall return). The Tersext hymns dwell on the crucifixion, but the reading from Zechariah 11.10-13 recalls the value placed on the life of Jesus, thirty shekels of silver. After this the Patriarch went to the church of Hagia Irene to catechize and receive the profession of faith of those to be baptized. At Vespers our readings from Exodus and Job continue with Moses meeting God, but not seeing His face (Ex. 33.11-23), and God blessing the faithful Job (42.12-17). There is then a suffering servant reading from Isaiah 52.13-54.1, and in I Corinthians 1.18-2.2 it is confirmed that God's power is to be found in weakness. The Gospel reading is the passion of Orthodox Good Friday, another harmonized reading of the gospels of Matthew, Luke and John. The story is continued from the condemnation, through the account of Judas's death, the crowning with thorns, release of Barabbas, and the Scourging. The crucifixion itself is followed by the darkness over the land and the rending of the Temple veil (as promised at Matins). The soldiers make sure that all are dead, and Jesus' body is taken down from the cross and buried. This Vespers did once include a Liturgy of the Presanctified, which was out of use by 1200³¹.

The rites of Holy Saturday were quite simple; Matins with the troparion, "Soldiers guard your sepulchre and the angels praise you...", also has readings; Ezekiel 37.1-14, the account of the valley of dry bones, I Cor. 5.6-8 and Gal. 3.13-14 concerning the new leaven, and finally the making of the sepulchre secure from Matthew 27.62-66. These

three readings conclude Holy Saturday Matins in the contemporary rite and allow us to wait in hope of the glorious resurrection to be celebrated in the night. Towards midday the Emperor was to change the cover on the Holy Table, the altar, and all is made ready for the Great Vigil.

The Vigil started in the evening and the Hagios Stavros typicon gives references to the Old Testament readings, most of which are still read today³². The readings covered the baptisms, and all were read only if the number of Baptizands was great. The newly baptized were brought into church and heard Romans 6.3-11 telling them that they had been baptized into Christ's death so as to walk in newness of life. The Gospel, Matthew 28.1-20, was the account of the Resurrection, and the newly baptized would receive communion at this Liturgy of St Basil. Later in the morning came the second liturgy with the reading of Acts 1.1-8 and John 1.1-17. In both cases these appear to have been seen as the beginning of a continuous reading, certainly of John, to go on until Pentecost³³. The Eastertide reading of Acts could be seen as the account of the nascent church, now that their experience of the resurrection had turned the apostles back to the risen Christ. The John reading, perhaps the post-resurrection reflection on the life of Him now proclaimed as risen, and present in the power of the Spirit to strengthen and uphold His people³⁴.

³¹ Ibid., 83, and fn. 1.

³² Ibid., 86-87.

³³ Ibid., 90-91.

³⁴ For a detailed study of these services see, G. Bertonière *The Historical Development of the Easter Vigil and Related Services in the Greek Church* (Rome: OCA 193, 1972).

The Combination of the Services

One of the great complicating factors of Byzantine liturgical history is the wholesale importation into the monasteries of Constantinople of Palestinian monastic offices, probably made attractive by their rich hymnody. The history is complex and convoluted, suffice to say that the eventual result of this was that after the thirteenth century, the old Constantinopolitan daily services were largely replaced by Palestinian monastic offices³⁵. The older office continued in some places a bit longer, but is otherwise now only represented by certain prayers and other elements, often divorced from their original context. At the same time, as these services were imported, so was the Jerusalem pattern of Holy Week observances with them. Even though these observances were originally a broadly popular urban celebration, they had been increasingly imitated in the rather smaller forum of the monasteries, especially that of Mar Saba, St Sabas.

Influence did not run only east to west. The Byzantine eucharistic liturgy greatly influenced Jerusalem and its environs, so much so that the local Jerusalem liturgy of St James, in its Greek recension, seems not to have been frequently used after the twelfth/thirteenth centuries. Its place was increasingly taken by the Constantinople liturgies of Basil and John Chrysostom, but from about the eleventh/twelfth centuries, the Great Entrance hymn at the Byzantine Paschal Vigil liturgy was increasingly that of St James, well known in English as the hymn "Let all mortal flesh keep silence"³⁶.

³⁵ The process is limpidly summarized in Robert F. Taft, *The Byzantine Rite: A Short History* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), esp. chapter 5.

³⁶ Robert F. Taft, *The Great Entrance* (Rome: OCA 200, 1975), 76-77, where it is also noted that this hymn was still only an alternative in the Typicon printed at Venice in 1545.

Although many of the structural elements of the old Constantinopolitan office were lost to sight, the pattern of readings that we have seen above was retained, with some adaptation to the differently arranged services. For example, readings associated with the Byzantine Tersext throughout Lent were inserted into the monastic Sixth Hour, where they mostly are to be found today. On the other hand, reading patterns associated with Jerusalem were also retained, so, for example, we find that there are now Gospel readings at Matins in Holy Week as well as at Vespers, though they are not the same as those in the old Armenian lectionary. Matthew 21.18-43 on Monday, including the parable of the vineyard, stresses faithfulness to divine authority. On Tuesday, Matthew 22.15-23.39, starts by calling for rendering to God the things that are God's and finishes by upbraiding the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. On Wednesday, John 12.17-50 continues to show that Jesus' faithfulness to God is not understood but is provoking hostility. Thursday's Luke 22.1-39 is the account of the Last Supper but combined with Judas' betrayal and the prediction that Peter will fail in faithfulness. These readings are again not so interested in strict chronology as they are in establishing the fact that it is Jesus' faithfulness to the mission given him by the Father that brings him face to face with the sin and human weakness that leads to his being abandoned.

On the whole the biggest importation from Palestine appears to have been of liturgical poetry, to which I shall return shortly. Perhaps the most striking addition to the Byzantine cursus of readings was the 12 Passion Gospels of the Thursday to Friday night vigil. As we have seen, these were originally attached to the Byzantine *Pannychis*, and later they become an integral part of a Matins service that largely reflects Palestinian

shape, but they are clearly no longer part of a stational liturgy. This service is now confined within the building where it is celebrated. Another Good Friday addition to the round of services is the Royal Hours. To put this very briefly, the Armenian and Georgian lectionaries give lessons and chants for the three hour service from midday that was mentioned by Egeria. Most of these were subsequently reorganized into four sets of Old Testament reading, Epistle and Gospel, preceded by hymnody, and then integrated into the structures of the First, Third, Sixth and Ninth canonical hours as they had developed in Palestinian monasticism³⁷. The *Anastasis Typicon* mentions this set of services, so we may reasonably assume them to exist in the tenth century.

I will not go into detail about the Royal Hours but simply mention that the Gospels are the passion narratives of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in that order. Several of the readings are repeated elsewhere in the week as will be readily apparent. It is likely that arranging what had been a single service into four separate services is entirely artificial, they were probably always served together as they are today. It is extremely unlikely that this ancient Jerusalem Good Friday service directly influenced the Three Hours Service so beloved of some Anglican and other churches. This latter is believed to have originated in Jesuit churches in seventeenth century Peru, and probably its only connection with what we are describing here would be the common desire to observe the biblical three hours that Christ hung upon the cross.

³⁷ Janeras, op.cit., 317-332.

The Liturgical Poetry

One of the characteristics of the modern Byzantine liturgical tradition is the sheer number of books that one needs to celebrate the services, especially Matins and Vespers. In full, one needs the *Oktoechos* for ordinary Sundays and weekdays, the *Triodion* for Lent, the *Pentekostarion* for Eastertide, and the twelve monthly volumes of the *Menaion* for all the feasts that keep to a fixed annual date. This of course is in addition to the *Horologion*, containing the fixed parts of the services, the Psalter and the priest's books with the prayers and litanies in, not to mention the *Typicon* which tells you how to combine all the different elements into a single, given celebration. The great size and complexity of these books is largely due to the huge wealth of poetic material that they contain. The liturgical books we have mentioned were in fact the result of the codification of material that had been scattered through disparate collections of canons, stichera, troparia, kontakia and so on. I shall not attempt to go into detail but very briefly: canons are lengthy poetic compositions that relate (often distantly) to the Biblical canticles that they have almost entirely replaced; stichera are normally inserted between verses of fixed psalmody; troparia are quite short poetic verses found in a variety of forms and functions; while kontakia are often the relics of much longer poetic pieces that fell into desuetude when the canon became the favoured form.

The original kontakia and a very limited number of troparia were found in the old Constantinopolitan tradition, which had relied very much upon psalms and other biblical poetry. The great wealth of other material was largely the result of a creative explosion of poetic composition, associated above all with the monastery of Mar Saba, which

accompanied the restoration of monastic life in the Holy Land after the destruction wrought by the Persian invasion of 614³⁸. The material which we are interested in is contained in the *Triodion*. This first emerged as a liturgical book for Lent and Easter around the tenth century, and then grew so large as to be divided, from the fourteenth century³⁹, so that the title *Triodion* now normally applies only to the Lenten volume.

The name *Triodion*, three odes, refers to the canon of Biblical canticles at Matins. Nowadays it is normal for poetic canons of eight (occasionally nine) odes to be sung, only the Magnificat remaining as a relic of the scriptural canticles. It would appear that the older method of using these odes was to have one ode varying for each day of the week, and then numbers eight and nine, the *Benedicite*, and the Magnificat and Benedictus combined. This can be seen in Lent when, at least in some churches, the verses of the three ode canticles are interspersed through the later stanzas of the actual canticles done in full. Combined with this, there will also be a canon for the saint of the day with two verses of the appropriate canticle between the stanzas. In Holy Week there is no canticle for the saint of the day, we revert to the older arrangement, but for some reason the scriptural canticles have entirely disappeared. All this means that the poetic material for Holy Week is a good deal less than in Lent proper.

Another interesting feature is the way in which the stichera for these days at Matins, are repeated at Vespers in a subtly different context. This appears to run counter

³⁸ Taft, *The Byzantine Rite...* op.cit., 58, and for more detail Egon Wellesz *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), esp. 204-5.

³⁹ Taft, *ibid.* and entry for *Triodion* in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 2118-9.

to the normal Orthodox understanding that the liturgical day begins at Vespers the night before. However the extremely important Typicon of the Byzantine monastery of Evergetis (edited from a twelfth century manuscript)⁴⁰ gives a somewhat different order of much of the same material. Part of this difference stems from the fact that while throughout Lent, the praise psalms, 148-50, have been recited without stichera, nowadays they do have stichera in Holy Week. The Evergetis typicon, and other similar documents such as the typicon of the monastery of Saint Saviour at Messina in Sicily (dated 1131)⁴¹, and the typicon of Alexis the Studite (of around the same period)⁴², all specifically exclude any stichera on the Praise psalms, and distribute much the same set of stichera among the Matins aposticha⁴³, and the stichera at 'Lord I have cried at Vespers, with very few repeats. A good example of the fluidity of the arrangements is that the stichera of Holy Thursday Vespers in the Messina typicon, are the stichera of the aposticha at Matins that morning in Evergetis, and virtually vice versa! The Alexian typicon is closer to Evergetis here, as befits a document of Studite provenance. Clearly these stanzas are not overly tied to the time of day!

It is clear then that stichera on the praise psalms are a relatively late feature of Holy Week, a development that took place after the composition and collection of these hymns. Similarly the older documents are happy to require three or four stanzas, with very few repeats, whereas aggregating the Vespers of Monday to Wednesday to normal

⁴⁰ A. Dmitrievsky (ed) *Opisanie liturgičeskikh rukopisej khranjaščikhsja v Bibliotekakh pravoslavnago Vostoka* 3 vols., (Kiev: 1895, 1901, Petrograd, 1917), vol I, 543 ff.

⁴¹ Edited by Miguel Arranz, *Le typicon du monastère du Saint-Sauveur à Messine* (Rome: OCA 185, 1969), 230ff.

⁴² Edited by David Petras, *The Typicon of the Patriarch Alexis the Studite: Novgorod-St Sophia 1136* (Cleveland: privately published 1991), 65-70.

⁴³ Psalm verses and stichera towards the end of weekday Matins, and most forms of Vespers.

Lenten use requires ten stanzas at a Vespers with Presanctified Liturgy. Hence the tendency of the modern books to repeat these verses rather more often than the older books would have.

The purpose of all these technicalities is so that we might establish whether there is a clear and consistent order of the poetic works that would allow us to build up a coherent developing theological meaning. Bearing in mind the displacements between these Typica and the modern books, I will follow the Evergetis order. On Monday we sing of Christ coming to his passion, and an important sticheron "The serpent found a second Eve" refers to Joseph being sexually harassed by the wife of Potiphar, and the message is to flee from sin⁴⁴. Tuesday, beginning on Monday evening, whether with Vespers or Matins, has the question "Into the splendour of the saints how shall I enter?", if we are to flee from sin, we must first recognize it and shun it. Tuesday has a call to serve the Master eagerly, and we continue the theme of preparation with a recalling of what we are entrusted with, "Behold, ...the master entrusts thee with a talent". In Evergetis most of the hymns we now associate with Wednesday Matins are found at Tuesday Vespers - of course, that means Tuesday night in any case. The hymns dwell on the anointing by the woman with a bad reputation and could be said to come to a popular climax with the hymn attributed to Kassiani "The woman who had fallen into many sins, perceiving thy divinity, O Lord, fulfilled the part of a myrrh-bearer." This is given for Tuesday Vespers in Evergetis, but Wednesday Vespers in Messina. In both cases it was sung only once, nowadays, like so many of these other texts, twice, once at the end of Wednesday Matins and then again at Vespers on Wednesday evening.

Wednesday Vespers appears to be the original home of the stanza that begins, "In haste the council of the Jews assembles" now appointed for Thursday Matins. Messina putting it later at Thursday evening Vespers, that is the present Thursday liturgy. There must have been an attempt to keep to a more historicizing chronology by moving a reference to the council to come closer to the supper. From here we concentrate on Judas' betrayal. The present last stanza of this series (at Thursday Matins in Evergetis and at Vespers at Messina): "Instructing thy disciples in the mystery, O Lord", contains a call for mutual service patterned on that of Christ. This brings us to the theme of the Holy Thursday liturgy and the ancient ceremony of the washing of feet.

Concluding Reflections

I will not take my detailed consideration of the hymnology any further as it is somewhat more obvious. This is possibly a disappointment for some, and I would only urge them to read the texts for themselves, they are a rich and fascinating collection. I have dwelt on the early part of Holy Week in order to show that it is an integral part of the whole thrust of meaning. The stichera and the other poetic pieces are a sort of running commentary on the otherwise heavily biblical content of the week's services.

We may recall that we began with prophecy and warnings of tribulations to come; we were called to prepare to meet God, as well as to carry out His word, and parables of judgement throw our whole existence into an eschatological context. Faithfulness is called for and is exemplified by one, a prostitute, who would normally be regarded as

⁴⁴ Full English texts in *Lenten Triodion*, 514-556.

faithless, whilst one of the faithful disciples turns traitor. The Holy Thursday liturgy takes us directly to the meaning of the eucharist as a call to both mutual service and to faithfulness for the sake of the kingdom. It is interesting that the Messina typicon expected the foot-washing ceremony to follow the vesperal part and precede the readings of the Liturgy⁴⁵. This seems to underline the fact that we cannot presume, but must be purified in order to partake.

The Good Friday Matins, which is supposed to start at 8 p.m. and finish in the small hours, and which is still a service that starts and finishes quite late, brings us back into the more historicizing Jerusalem style of service. The idea of watching with Christ on the night of the agony may be one of the reasons why this is one of the more popular services. The hymnody, probably once intended to accompany movement from one site of the Holy Land to another, dwells on a limited number of themes, especially betrayal of Jesus by his own people, and denial by Peter. Interpreted correctly these should not be seen as anti-semitic outbursts so much as calls to face our own betrayal of God and each other. The historicizing theme is particularly strong in those places where the cross is brought out at antiphon 15: "Today he who hung upon the waters is hung upon the cross", but this could be said to distract from the main theme, as well as being out of actual chronological sequence. As so often in these services we are not called simply to have compassion for the suffering Christ, but to face our betrayals of life itself.

The passion reflection of the Royal Hours leads us to Good Friday's Vespers of the Passion. Let us recall that the other readings relate Moses' meeting God, God's

⁴⁵ Arranz, *op.cit.*, 234-5.

blessing of the faithful Job, the promise of the Suffering Servant's vindication, and the Paul's pointing out that God's strength is to be found in what we may consider weakness. Once again, there is in the Constantinople readings no great interest in historic chronology, so much as a desire to get us to look beyond the actual manifestations of suffering to see what faithfulness really means. The service sees the bringing out of the winding-sheet, so we may begin to consider what the death of Christ means for us now. This is the theme of the extremely popular Saturday Matins on Good Friday night, so popular indeed that some busy Russian city churches have it both in the evening, and in the early morning, its more ancient time, to accommodate those wishing to attend. In Greek churches this service is celebrated in white vestments and the people wish one another "Happy Resurrections". Once again, strict historic chronology is not necessary. We have already begun to contemplate more than the historic events and the well-known *threnoi* or lamentations of this service have us contemplating the whole of creation as involved in the momentous fact of Christ's death, and looking forward to his emerging victorious from the tomb.

In the final moments of the Holy Week, as we begin to acknowledge the presence of the risen Christ with his people, we sing "Arise, O God, and judge the earth: for thou shalt have an inheritance in all nations" immediately before the Gospel of the Resurrection. This is the moment when Russian clergy change into white vestments. There was a long standing tradition that Christ rose during the night, which is probably one of the main reasons for the tradition of prayer at night in various forms of vigil, not just the Paschal one. The Paschal Vigil was, and remains, the vigil of vigils. Let us

recall that even today, the *Typicon* requires that this service begin at the tenth hour of the day⁴⁶, that is four in the afternoon - not the eight or nine in the morning that is now normal. We may assume that this service could last until about 8, and anciently nobody left the church. People remained, reading the Acts of the Apostles by turn, and sustained by a little bread and wine blessed at the end of the Liturgy, together with a few figs or dates. Then at midnight comes the procession, which in Jerusalem went to the Basilica of the Resurrection, followed by a service of Matins which today is almost entirely composed of hymnic material; the canon and the Paschal Stichera. This outpouring of praise of Christ's resurrection is followed by the second Liturgy, and people return home in the small hours, or remain together, to eat and drink together while it is still dark, which itself is an eschatological statement.

We began on Palm Sunday with rejoicing at the royal entry of Christ into Jerusalem. We might also see this as the Bridegroom coming to the feast. But the message is not triumphalist; on Monday it is seen that this King has come to serve, remember Joseph as a slave in Egypt. So now we recognize that the Bridegroom is not actually with us, we must watch, pray and fast. The troparion "Behold the Bridegroom comes" recalls the wise and foolish virgins, and we must know which we are, for it is too easy to heedlessly fall into betrayal and unfaithfulness. Only those who recognize their need for it can really appreciate forgiveness. A further aspect of faithfulness is to the true meaning of the Bridegroom's eucharistic banquet, that is, to mutual service. The next step for those called to the feast is to meet the God who is hidden in suffering and weakness, in those alone we see His face. The watch is now prolonged and becomes the

⁴⁶ See e.g., *Lenten Triodion*, 655.

vigil of the whole earth waiting for the consummation of all things in the triumphant risen Christ, the Bridegroom at the eschatological banquet. Celebrated with care and attention, Orthodox Holy Week can be a way of coming up sharply against ourselves as weak and disloyal men and women called to be renewed. Nowhere is there a text or ceremony that tries to symbolize the resurrection, quite suddenly it is simply proclaimed as a fact, and without further reflection, we praise that resurrection and go on doing so for the next forty days! We may not know the moment that it happened, but we can and often are changed by all this, changed from sinners who betrayed the Lord, into the faithful who proclaim his risen glory.

I hope that I have shown that in spite of the understandable, and often helpful, tendency for Holy Week to become a chronological remembrance of historic events - something that has happened in probably all liturgical traditions of Holy Week. In spite of this tendency, there is still this ancient liturgical ritual process, particularly associated with Constantinople, many miles from the holy places, which can challenge us to do more than simply meditate on the past, but allow the past events to challenge and change us.

An Afterthought

Inevitably somebody might ask if I would hope for some modifications to these services. I would certainly like to see some of the stichera re-arranged so as to make the services until Thursday morning clearer, and I do not think that it would be heresy to suggest that Matins might be served in the morning and Vespers in the evening.

Similarly, for all the undoubted pastoral value of the Service of Anointing, it should not exclude the celebration of Holy Thursday Matins, while the Liturgy of that day might profitably be served, if not at 2 p.m. as prescribed by the Typikon, then at perhaps midday or in the afternoon. It would also be good to see far more use of the Washing of Feet, a service that few bishops seem to perform. The service of the Twelve Gospels seems appropriately a Thursday night service in normal parish use, but I will admit to preferring the Russian custom of serving Royal Hours in the morning and Vespers in the afternoon of Good Friday. It would probably be difficult to move the Holy Saturday Matins into the early morning, except as mentioned above, where there is need for two services. However, I do very strongly feel that the Holy Saturday morning service should be the latest liturgy in the year as the Typikon expects it to be. A Ukrainian Orthodox priest friend in the USA has this liturgy in the afternoon, and blesses the Easter foods at it. His people find going out late at night unattractive, so the Easter Matins and Chrysostom liturgy are served on Easter Sunday morning. I am sure that appropriate patterns could be worked out, and I would remind any who read this, before they delate me for heresy, that I am simply advocating observance of the Typikon. The Typikon is ultimately simply a guide to the services, but in celebrating the services we enter into the mystery of God's redeeming love for us all - so maybe it is not just a dry book of rules after all!