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Holy and Great Easter Week, ‘Passion Week’, begins



Today is Holy Monday on the Orthodox calendar, the beginning of Holy and Great Easter Week, also known as “Passion Week”.
Holy Week actually commenced during the evening service on Palm Sunday, when the next day’s morning service, the Matins of Holy Monday, is celebrated.

Monday of Holy Week commemorates the blessed and noble Joseph and the fig tree, which was cursed and withered by the Lord. The withering of the fig tree was a miracle of special symbolism, since the tree had leaves, but no fruit. It is symbolic of the many people who claim ethical and religious identity, but who in reality have empty lives that bear no fruit.

This was also the case with some of the Pharisees of that period. Jesus cursed the

tree, saying: “…May no fruit ever come from you again!”

The reference to the story of the virtuous Joseph of the Old Testament is made only for contrast, since the life of Joseph was a model of propriety and sincere observance of ethical principles.

On this evening, we begin with the Hymn of the Bridegroom, which begins “…Behold the Bridegroom comes in the midst of the night…beware, therefore, O my soul, lest thou be borne down in sleep…and lest thou be shut out from the Kingdom…”

The canticle hymn also has a symbolic exhortation:

It states: “…I see thy bridal hall adorned, O my Savior, and I have no wedding garment…O giver of Light, make radiant the vesture of my soul and save me.”

At this time, the solemn procession of the Icon of Christ-Bridegroom takes place around the church.

This year’s Passion Week, nevertheless, is unprecedented for Orthodoxy and Orthodox believers, given the global coronavirus pandemic, and strict restrictions in place against exposure to the virus.

For instance, in predominately Orthodox Greece, measures against the non-essential movement and public assemblies, imposed by the state, along with recommendations by the Holy Synod of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece, have prohibited any visit to cathedrals or chapels by worshipers, even for so-called personal worship.

On its part, the Orthodoxia news agency will live stream services throughout Holy and Great Easter from the St. Nicholas chapel, located in the middle of the lagoon of Porto Lagos, an ecclesiastical glebe of the Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopedi.