19/04/2022

Homiliy by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Second Bridegroom Service – Matins of Holy and Great Tuesday



My beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

There are many marvelous aspects to Holy Week: the magnificent services, the inversion of time (tonight, for example, we are serving the Matins of tomorrow, Holy Tuesday) and the unique character of our worship.

But above all, how we enter into this week with our Lord Jesus Christ is so essential. For we follow the Lord moment by moment with His Disciples – those who followed Him, who betrayed Him and who denied Him.

And I know that it is difficult to put aside the daily affairs and cares of life, business and family in order to enter into this alternate timeline – if you will. For in Holy Week, we truly stand in the presence of all the actors around our Lord, as they struggle to understand the meaning of His precious and unfathomable sacrifice on the Cross.

It was hard for the Lord's followers. And I mean not only the Twelve, but all the women who accompanied Him and provided for Him. Remember, it was the women who remained by the Cross until the end. And it was the Women who were first to the Empty Tomb.

Our Holy Week is like a telescope that extends back over two thousand years to the actual hours, minutes and seconds of the Days of our Lord's Passion, Death, Burial and Resurrection. Except our telescope collapses on itself, and we are not only observers of this Sacred History, we are participants as well. As each moment passes, something about our own souls is revealed. The more we participate, the more we learn.

We hear the judgment of the Pharisees and Scribes in tonight's reading of the Holy Gospel, but do we think about how we exercise our faith, and whether we can

endure the same critique? Or do we shut our ears to the deeper challenge, to live our faith without hypocrisy and with integrity?

We wait patiently through the hymns and readings, like the Disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, and our eyes might grow heavy, as did theirs. We can feel in our bodies the strain of this Week, the pressure to be with our Lord in His agonies of soul and body. But sometimes we also feel put off by having to go to Church so many times in one single week.

We stand through long services, and we tire easily. But if we were standing by the Cross of the Lord as He gave His life for ours, how would we withstand the test? These moments in the flow of every Holy Week are the challenges to our hearts and souls that will either lift us up, or uncover how far we have fallen. You see, my friends, Holy Week is the crucible of our spiritual honesty. Within this week, if we truly live in this week as if we were truly there with Christ, at every stage, our souls would be purified like gold in the fire.

This is why this Week is so vital to every Christian. It is our yearly opportunity to bring us into contact – physical and spiritual – with the central acts of our salvation. The intensity of the events of Holy Week warrant that it only happens once a year, on the anniversary of Holy Pascha. I am not sure we could endure this tension and emotion fifty-two weeks in a row!

For this is not a time of the usual community happenings – whether they are social, educational, or cultural.

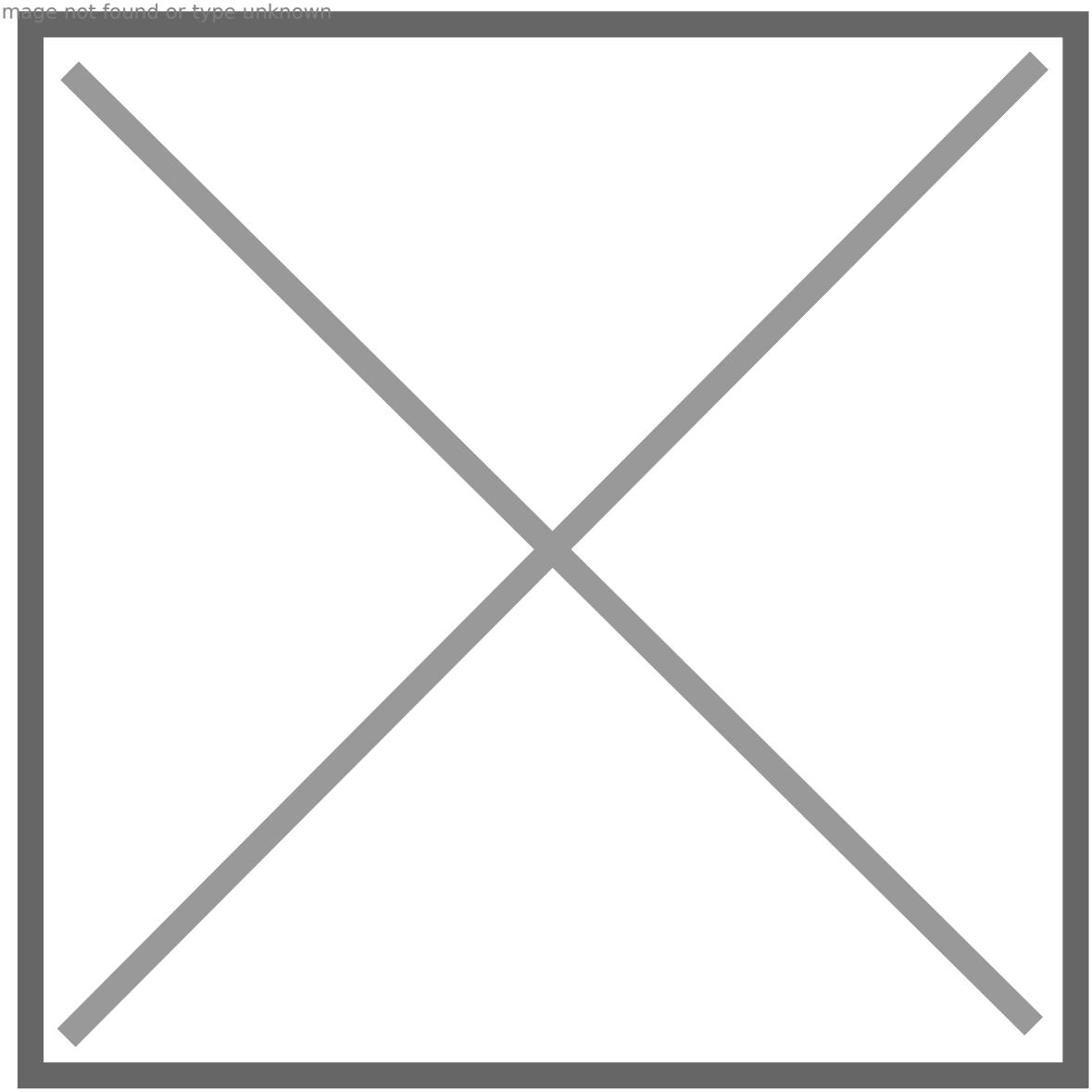
This is a time when we are confronted with the full accounting of the price of our salvation. When we hear about thirty pieces of silver to betray a friend. When we hear about three hundred denarii to anoint a Master. When we hear about all the humiliations and torments that the Lord endured for our sake. This is a profound and powerful week that we called to embrace. Or we can run from it, like the Disciples on the night when their Shepherd was struck and they were scattered.[*]

Holy Week is our encounter with the fullness of our salvation, the totality of God’s redeeming love for us. Let us stand with our Lord in these Holy Days, and live this Holy Week with Him.

Having shared in His Passion, we shall share in His Resurrection, unto life eternal:

Together with His Father Who is from everlasting, and the All Holy, Good and Life-giving Spirit, One God; now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen. Καλὴ Ἀνάσταση!

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