

## **The Purpose of Holy Week**

Many people ask “What is my purpose in life?” To answer this question people will go on talk shows, read self-help books, visit therapist, go to career counselors and often pray to God. The list goes on. All these approaches are legitimate and should be based on the latter approach to looking for God for the answer, but we still have the question, “What is our purpose?” The most direct response to this question can be found in the Book of Genesis chapter 2 verse 15 where it clearly states that humanity’s purpose is to watch and labor. Now what exactly does that mean? The interpretations are vast but in this time of Great Lent and as Pascha (Easter) approaches we are called to reflect on the directive for us to labor. The Hebrew word for labor also means to cultivate, worship, serve, or to be enslaved. Therefore our purpose is to cultivate and work in this world by doing the Lord’s will as His servants (or literally slaves) and worship Him. We fulfill our purpose when we give our creator the adoration that is due and live a life that glorifies God. This is seen in people who spread the Gospel by living lovingly and who have it as their purpose to unwaveringly worship the Lord. With this in mind and as we approach the greatest feast of the Church let us strive to comprehend the beauty of Holy Week and look closely at how we can take full advantage of fulfilling our purpose in life.

### **Don’t miss out**

In the Gospel of Matthew it speaks about ten women who were waiting. (Matt. 25:1-13) They were waiting for their bridegroom to whom they were to be espoused. As the parable goes, not all ten were the wisest. Five actually did not prepare properly and they missed out on the opportunity to dwell with their ordained spouse. What sadness, what regret, what disappointment and this is what is going to happen to us if we are not vigilant and prepared. It is natural then to have the first three nights of Holy Week to be focused on the expectation and vigilance of the coming of the inevitable judgment day. Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church, of which we are the living stones. Sunday, Monday and Tuesday night we will sing “Behold the Bridegroom comes in the midst of the night, Blessed is the servant who He finds vigilant ...”. Life is about being ready for what ever comes our way so that when the Lord returns we are ready and not consumed in finals exams, making more money, or playing with the latest electronic toys. If we are to serve Him we must be present to His divine worship which manifests itself in the first three nights of Holy Week. So don’t miss out.

### **Prepare for your death**

Pascha is all about dying to ourselves so to find life in Christ. This type of death definitely means a spiritual death and could also refer to a physical death. On Holy Wednesday, within the tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church, we administer the sacrament of Holy Unction. This service, which is established on St. James’ account for the healing of the sick (James 5:14), emphasizes the need of our physical and spiritual healing. The sacrament has in ancient times been used to prepare the faithful to meet the Lord as they went to their execution because they were Christians. Most likely none of us will be faced with our physical persecution but on a spiritual level we are truly persecuted if we are sincerely living a life of Christ. As Christians we can not submit to the pressures of having the biggest house, excessively indulging in food or alcohol, or participating in some type of inappropriate relationship. Rather we need to be self-sacrificing as was Christ. On

Holy Wednesday let us participate in the healing of both soul and body and prepare to die with Christ on the Cross which results in life eternal.

### **Facing the Sorrow**

As a priest I have seen death in many forms and expressions. As a result I have thoroughly searched for the healthiest approach to dealing with death. In secular modern psychology it is agreed upon that the healthiest approach is to face it. The last thing that anyone should do is try to ignore the reality of death or deny that we are mortal and turn a blind eye to the tragedy of the loss of a loved one. On Holy Thursday we experience a therapeutic worship that places Christ's death right in front of us so not to make any mistake that God died. Probably one of the most somber services in the Orthodox Church is the reading of the 12 gospels that labor the fact that death and injustice is part of this crazy world. On Holy Thursday night we need to have the courage to see the sadness and despair that even God endured. Our God does not paint a rosy picture but rather He exposes it for what it is, horrible. But for us this experience of suffering allows us to grow in Christ and death becomes a means to life rather an end to our existence.

### **Let yourself Cry**

Some claim that if you were to collect your tears of sorrow in a cup and test the chemical make up of the liquid you would find it to be extremely toxic. This being the case, it would be logical to expel this toxin from your body hence a legitimate reason to encourage the flow of tears (crying) in every human being. We see this therapeutic technique on Holy Friday during the evening worship service of the "Lamentations". After chanting over 50 verses of sorrowful reflective verses we allow for the poison to leave our souls and bodies and make the transition to joyful expectation. Christ has not risen from the grave yet, but the taste of victory is in the air. We solemnly process around the church with our candles lit as we remember that "in the grave they laid you O Christ ...", "in Your suffering, O Word, You had neither form nor beauty, and we are "moved to tears, when You, O Word, did die." In it's divine wisdom the Church encourages to let go of the poison in our lives and release it through mourning the tragedy of death. Therefore let Holy Friday be the day of purification and let us all chant in joy on that night that "every generation offer adoration to your entombment O Christ".

### **Feasting in Life and Joy**

The expectation, the grief, the tears all lead to a place absent of sorrow, suffering, hard work, and death. (Rev. 21:4) If not why in the world would we voluntarily go through such a process? In this life and in the one to come there will ultimately be peace for those whose sight is on the Lord. Therefore on Holy Pascha, Easter, at 12:00 midnight we enter into the feast singing Christ is Risen. The fast is broken, the mourning has stopped, the tears have dried up and as a community we celebrate the joyous time of the Resurrection. Let us fulfill our purpose and truly serve the Lord by crying out:

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!