



Thoughts From Father Michael
"Lenten Challenges"

May 2019

The Apostle and Evangelist, John the Theologian – the only one of Christ’s Apostles to stand with the Virgin Mary and the other women at the Cross – records in his gospel the last words of the Savior, “It is finished!” [John 19:30] To what does “It” refer?

Is “it” the agony of suffering crucifixion which is what many Western Christians believe? By being so overwhelmed by the pain and suffering nailed to the wooden cross, Jesus succumbed to His suffering and cannot take this suffering any longer. He has had “it,” so to speak. He has given up.

Iconographically, He is depicted, many times in three dimensions, with a writhing twisted body and a face full of pain that is weighed down looking at the ground; a rood cross.

Eastern Christian iconography, on the other hand, shows Him at peace as if sleeping. His body is calm, as if reclining. Eastern Christians focus on the benefits of Christ’s death; i.e., defeating death, and not on the instrument of execution. The Cross is now no longer an instrument of death, but is now the “Life Giving Cross,” and we place the Cross in prominent places in our homes and churches, wear crosses around our necks, place it on vestments, and bless people with it.

For all Christians until the Middle Ages in the West, and now for all Orthodox Christians the “It” is not the agony of crucifixion, but the completion of Christ’s mission on earth. Christ makes it very clear to His Disciples that he did not come to dwell among us to destroy the Law and the Prophets. Rather, “I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” [Matt 5:17]

By the time of His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem that we celebrate on Palm Sunday, He had fulfilled almost all of the prophecies recorded in the books of the Old Testament: preaching to the poor, healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, raising the paralytic, cleansing the lepers, exorcising the demons, and raising the dead. Indeed, His entrance into Jerusalem on the foal of an ass was prophesied by Zechariah [9:9]. Still, there are a few more prophecies to fulfill and they could not be fulfilled until His betrayal, His arrest, His trial, and His crucifixion.

Knowing that He must die by crucifixion [*“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”* John 3:14], He as Man, is in agony sweating blood and praying to His Father “if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” [Matt 26:39] As the Son of God He knows what He must endure and so concludes that He will continue with His godly mission.

Now, the remaining prophecies can only be fulfilled on the Cross. When Jesus cries out, “Eloi, Eloi, Eloi, why has thou forsaken Me” He is not thinking His Father has abandoned Him. Rather, He is reciting the first words of Psalm 22 (21) that contains actions that are taking place before Him: casting

lots for His clothes, Pharisees and Scribes wagging their heads and berating Him to save Himself, saying He is thirsty and asking for a drink. These actions as well as others are recorded in the Psalm and are reported in the gospels as happening in Jesus' presence.

None of these prophecies could have been accomplished beforehand, but could now that He is hanging on the Cross. So, when He completed all the prophecies on this side of the grave, when He had done all that was asked of Him, He says my mission for which I was sent is now accomplished, there is nothing more for Me to do. "It," My mission is completed. "It is finished!"

It is like a composer putting the final note on his musical composition. It is like the novelist completing the final editing of his manuscript. It is like the carpenter putting the last nail in his cabinet, or desk, or dresser. It is like the sculpture saying no more stone needs to be chipped away. My masterpiece is finished. Christ's masterwork of inaugurating a new covenant between God and His people is finished.

As Man He suffered and prayed for this cup to pass, but as God He was in charge of His life. According to the gospel accounts when the final prophecy on this side of the grave is fulfilled, He bows His head and gives up His spirit: "He said, 'It is finished!' And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit." [John 19:30] Earlier He had instructed His Disciples about His authority: "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father." When it came time to commit His soul to God, He does it on His own authority. Thus, when He feels it is time to die, He 'lays down His life.' He dies of His own volition. That is why Pontius Pilate is astonished to learn that Christ is already dead when Joseph of Arimathea asks for His body. "Pilate marveled that He was already dead." [Mark 15:44]

Yet, there are two more prophecies to be accomplished. Christ must fulfill the prophecy of Ezekiel about the dry bones. [Ezek 37:1-14] According to Ezekiel's prophecy the dry bones of the dead will be fitted together – bone to bone – then sinews and muscles will begin to hold them together; then they will take on flesh and skin will cover them. Then the Spirit of God will breathe on them, and they will live. For Christ to fulfill this prophecy He must enter Hades and He can only do that by dying "trampling down death by death."

The prayer the priest says when he places the chalice and the disco on the altar after the Great Entrance makes clear that Christ is everywhere present: "In the grave with the body but in Hades with the soul as God; in paradise with the thief, and on the throne with the Father and the Spirit wast thou, O Christ, filling all things. Thyself uncircumscribed." In Hades after breaking down its doors, He enters in and raises Adam and Eve, David and Solomon, John the Baptist and all the prophets, as well as all the faithful people who departed this life before Him. According to Matthew's gospel [27:52-53] "... and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the city and appeared to many."

The final prophecy to be accomplished, of course, is His rising from the dead on the third day which He does on the first day of the week, Sunday; the Eighth Day. He will spend the next forty days "opening the Scriptures" to His Disciples, now that they are prepared to hear and to heed Him, then He will ascend into heaven from which He had come as a babe, to return to His Father. As He tells His Disciples He must return to His Father to send them the Holy Spirit [John 15:26; 16:7]. When the Spirit does descend on Pentecost ten days after His Ascension, Peter is prepared to quote Scripture boldly that affirms that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Christ, the Messiah.

John the Evangelist was an eyewitness to the final hours of Jesus' human life as he was the only one of the Disciples who stood at the Cross. He was there to hear Christ's last words: "It is finished!" Fulfilling all the prophecies Christ does indeed satisfy the expectations God the Father has for Him.

So, what does this mean for us? We are the beneficiaries of His suffering, His grace, His love, and His inauguration of the New Covenant. We are the New Israel born out of the Old Covenant. We are blessed by His actions that allows us to enter into paradise and His Kingdom.

Christ is Risen! And we are no longer in bondage to death. How great is our God!

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!

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Spiritual Sayings

For what constitutes the particular characteristic of the myrrh bearing women? Their constant patient following of the Lord, as if seeking Him. They minister to Him from their substance and accompany Him to Jerusalem; they follow Him as He bears the cross. They surround Him when He is crucified on Golgatha; they watch where He is laid after He is taken from the Cross. After the sabbath, early in the morning they hasten to the grave; and while still in total darkness they are overjoyed by the manifestation of the Resurrection, and they run to inform the Apostles about Him. With such zeal they cling to the Lord, so insatiably did they want to see Him and be near Him. And how can you not go and seek Him? Who is more beautiful than the Lord? He is adorned with virtue, more than any other of the sons of men. He is beautiful not only with divine beauty, but also with the beauty of human nature, with the lofty blend of all perfections that are natural to a human being. Those who contemplate this beauty are drawn to the Lord, and the Lord in His turn fills all who love Him with it.

St Theophan the Recluse

Spring Cleaning

Under the leadership of Bob Rolfes, President of the Parish Council, several people after Lazarus Saturday Liturgy volunteered to clean the church removing wax from the carpets and altar floor, dust the window sills, replace the burned out bulbs in the chandeliers, polish the altar vessels, vacuum the chairs, spray and clean the windows both inside and outside, trimmed the shrubs, power washed the church entrance and sidewalks, and other housekeeping chores.

Mona Elkhoully held a workshop on making palm crosses. The Ladies Society prepared a light lenten lunch to sustain the workers. With everyone's cooperation most the work was accomplished by 2:30 PM. Thanks to all who volunteered.

Holy Week

Lazarus Saturday and Holy week contain at least a dozen services, all of which allows us to join Christ's Disciples as they accompany Him first to Bethany and then into Jerusalem for His triumphal entry, and then to be with Him for the Last Supper before His betrayal, trial, and crucifixion. We are with them when He washes their feet and He institutes the Eucharist. We stand with His Mother and the other women at the Cross, and see Joseph of Aramathea and Nicodemus anoint His dead body and place it in a new tomb. We note Peter's denial, and then his repentance after he hears the cock crow. We are with the myrrh bearing women when they go to His tomb on Sunday morning to find it empty. We are with Peter when he accompanies John to the Empty Tomb "wondering at what had happened." Finally, we hear the astonishing news that He is risen, and when He as the Risen Lord accompanies Luke and Cleopas on the road to Emmaus, and then appears to His Disciples in the upper room where they are hiding for "fear of the Jews."

Holy Week is Jesus' last week on earth, and it is a roller coaster ride of ups and downs emotionally. Moreover, emotions run high for them and for us as there are several instances of strong men weeping: Jesus weeps at Lazarus' tomb, Joseph weeps when he introduces himself to his unbelieving brothers, especially his full brother Benjamin, and Peter weeps when he remembers what Christ had foretold of his three denials before the cock crows. Strong men weeping! Yes, some of the Fathers say that I person who can weep over his own sins is more saintly then one who can raise the dead.

All these emotional ups and downs have to be experienced so that they become part of us. They are not just a sentence or two [as in the above paragraphs], but a living interactive joy that allows us to make progress on our spiritual journey to the Kingdom.

Hopefully, we all should take part in these, services that our Mother Church provides for us. Because in this way we gain

Sayings from the Fathers

You will become worthy of the vision of the wondrous and blessed images of the Jerusalem on high in no other way than by day and night shedding tears according to the example of him who said: Every night I flood my bed, I water my couch with my tears (Ps 6:7). A tear shed from great sorrow and heartfelt distress is food for the soul, given from heavenly bread.

St Macarius the Great

Please Pray for the Following Brothers and Sisters:

Departed: Fahd Kassis, Nasser Elias Kakesh, Kosta Radich, Helen Kirshy, Thekla Massouh, Olga S. Kovalenko, Jeannie Davis, Richard Austin, Daniel Karpelenia, Andrew Mamary

Shut-ins/Sick: Metropolitan PAUL, Archbishop YOHANNA, Nicholas Hughes, Schauki Kassis, John Bennett, Rose Beede, Alice Flaherty, Theodora Ohlinger, Sally Bell, Bob Bostley, Bill Yopp, George Joseph Rolfes, Aurelia Buda, Eveyn Lonack, Richard Pippy, Diane Zorich, Lisa McCoy, Thomas Ziegler, Zachary & Edna Mason

For the Health of: Fr Lazarus Sucanto, Kh Loretta Karparlenia, Kh Virginia Massouh, Pf. Margot Siniari, Viola Haddad, Angela Jacob, Farhat David, Helen Massarelli, Carole Massarelli, John & Evelyn Salem, Helen Salem, Ruth & Evern Hazel, Gerorgette Abraham, Mariam Haddad, Bryan Haddad, Nasir Kassis, Geri & Mitch Kanaan, Photini Larson, Alice Faccenda, Pat Salem, David & Eva Szabo, Marion Bostley, Theodore Todorow, Alex Gimon, Diane Karns, Leo Poirier, Collin Lamkin, Sophie Massouh, Bob Poirier, Steve Bové, Natalie Floreancig, John Rollins, Millicent Palko, Leila Bashara

Service Members: Christopher Salem (Air Force): Nephew of Helen Salem), Peter McIntire: Nephew of Viola Haddad, Curtis Brickwood (Navy): Fr. Michael's Cousin, James Sexton(Army): Grandson of Michaelina Sexton, David Butler (Navy): Son of Joanna Kassis Butler, Trenton Wesley (Army): grandson of Leila Bashara, Luka Dundua (Army): Grandson of Salome Rollins

Upcoming Events

Monday, April 29 - May 4, 2019 - Bright Week
Sunday, May 5, 2019 - Thomas Sunday
Sunday, May 12, 2019 - Myrrh Bearing Women; Joseph & Nicodemus & Mother's Day
Monday, May 13, 2019 - 5:30 PM, AMEN's Dinner Meeting
Sunday, May 19, 2019 - Sunday of the Paralytic
Sunday, May 26, 2019 - Sunday of the Samaritan Woman
Thursday, June 6, 2019 - 10:30 AM, Liturgy for the Ascension
Parish Life Conference - June 12-15, 2019, Raleigh, North Carolina
Sunday, June 16, 2019 - Pentecost
Archdiocese Convention - July 21-28, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Sacramental Actions

On Holy Saturday before the Liturgy it was with great joy that Fr Stephen and Fr Michael baptized the Liss twin boys: Ethan Nicholas and Logan Edward Demitrius, sons Ted & Elena Liss.

At seventeen years of age, and at more than six foot three, it was a challenge to consider how to baptize them. With the assistance of Fr. Stephen, Bob Rolfes, Al Lipscome, their god-father, Demetrius "Jim" Calamas we were able to immerse them in an inflatable pool placed near the Fellowship Hall. Susan Helms is their god-mother.

Please pray for them and welcome them into the Holy Body of Christ.

Birthdays for May

1 May, Leila Bashara, Nadine Matar; 3 May, Laila Eve Baidurashvili; 4 May, Lindsay Quick;
5 May, Helen Salem, Anamay Rossomando, Emily Adkins Jadoun; 6 May, Seraphim Foltz, Mitch Kanaan;
8 May, Andrew Meier, Alibek Dagly; 9 May, Sophia Atik; 12 May, Gina Kanalos; 14 May, Meghan Weldon; 15 May, Jocelyn Patton, Barbara Dundua; 17 May, Robin Bianca, Luis Rodriguez, Jr., Charles F. Doerner;
18 May, Sub-Deacon Najib Jacob; 19 May, Jonathan Samborski; 20 May, Lance Lubin; 21 May, Stephen Bové, Luka Dundua; 22 May, Amanda Kanaan, Ilham Isaac; 26 May, Lea Maria Rahbani; 27 May, Helen Massarelli

Anniversaries for May

3 May, Ron & Anamay Rossomando; 4 May, Charles & Christine Doerner; 10 May, George & Jeanine Menze; 11 May, Sandra & Jordan Raynovich; 17 May, Darren & Kristen Wilkerson; 25 May, John & Carol Hisiro; 31 May, John & Lorraine Daher

Departed this Life in May

1 May, Fahd Kassis; 3 May, Nasser Elias Kakesh; 6 May, Kosta Radich; 8 May, Helen Kirshy; 20 May, Thekla Massouh; 23 May, Olga S. Kovalenko; 26 May, Jeannie Davis; 27 May, Richard Austin; 29 May, Daniel Karpelena

The Morning Prayer of the Last Elders of Optina

Lord, grant that I may meet all that this coming day brings to me with spiritual tranquility. Grant that I may fully surrender myself to Thy holy Will.

At every hour of this day, direct and support me in all things. Whatsoever news may reach me in the course of the day, teach me to accept it with a calm soul and the firm conviction that all is subject to Thy holy Will.

Direct my thoughts and feelings in all my words and actions. In all unexpected occurrences, do not let me forget that all is sent down from Thee.

Grant that I may deal straightforwardly and wisely with every member of my family, neither embarrassing nor saddening anyone.

O Lord, grant me the strength to endure the fatigue of the coming day and all the events that take place during it. Direct my will and teach me to pray, to believe, to hope, to be patient, to forgive, and to love.

Amen.

A-Men Dinner Meeting

All men of St Nicholas are cordially welcome to attend the next dinner meeting on Monday, May 13, 2019 in the Fellowship Hall. Cocktails and conversation begin at 5:30 pm with an excellent dinner prepared by Andi Budu at 6:15 pm. The name "A-Men" is the name the Diocese of Miami & the Southeast has adopted to bring church men together. It stands for Antiochian Men. Please join us for an evening of fellowship, fine food, and beverages.



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