

Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross  
Medford, New Jersey

2024

Our Daily Paschal Reader: Holy Saturday, May 4 – Pascha, May 5:, Reading #1: The Spiritual Witness of the Saints of Gaza: St. Dorotheus of Gaza - *“This is the Day of Resurrection” – Part 1*



*A Commentary on an Easter Hymn of St. Gregory of Nazianzus (Oration 1: On Pascha) - Part 1*

by St. Dorotheus of Gaza

**This is the day of resurrection...**

Let us offer our own selves,  
the possession most precious to God and closest to Him.  
Let us give back to the Image that which is according to the image,  
recognizing our value, honoring the Archetype,  
knowing the power of the mystery and for whom Christ died.

As usual, I am happy to say a few words about the song we sing, so that you will not be too taken up with the melody, but that your minds will be in harmony with the meaning of the words. What were we singing just now? **“This is the day of resurrection, let us offer ourselves.”**

The Israelite of old, coming together for their festivals according to the Law offered God gifts such

as incense, burnt offerings, first-fruits, and the like. St. Gregory invites us as well to celebrate this feast in God's honor as they did, and exhorts us to do so by saying, "**This is the day of resurrection,**" a day of divine assembly, the day of Christ's Passover. What is this "Passover" of Christ? The Israelites kept the Passover when they came out of Egypt. Easter, the Passover which we are now keeping and which the Saint commends to our celebration, is enacted in the soul, which comes out of the spiritual Egypt, that is, from sin. When the soul passes over from sin to virtue, then it celebrates the Passover of the Lord. As Evagrius says: "The Passover of the Lord is the passage away from evil."

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**Bright Monday, May 5: Our Daily Paschal Reader – Reading #2: The Spiritual Witness of the Saints of Gaza: St. Dorotheus of Gaza - "*This is the Day of Resurrection*" – Part 2**

Good morning:

Christ is risen!

We will continue our **Daily Reader through the Paschal Season** and this week will hear more from St. Dorotheus of Gaza's "**Commentary on an Easter Hymn of St. Gregory of Nazianzus (Oration 1: On Pascha)**

**Part 2**

**by St. Dorotheus of Gaza**

Today, Easter Day, is therefore the "Passover" of Christ, a day of brilliant festival, the day of Resurrection, the day of His nailing sin to the Cross, of His dying and being raised to life—all for our sakes. Let us offer ourselves as sacrificial gifts and offerings to the Lord, who has no desire for senseless animals. "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure" (Heb 10:5-6). And in Isaiah, the Lord says: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" (Is 1:11). But the Lamb of God was sacrificed for us, according to the Apostle who says, "Christ our Paschal Lamb is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor 5:7), to take away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29), and has become "a curse for our sake" according to the Scriptures: "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" in order to "redeem us from the curse of the Law" (Gal 3:13). That we may receive from Him "the position of sons" (Gal 4:5), we ought on our part at some time to offer him a gift that will please Him. And what sort of gift ought we offer to Christ in order to please Him on the day of his Resurrection, if he does not desire the sacrifice of senseless animals?

The Saint in his teaching tells us the answer, for after saying, "**It is the Day of Resurrection,**" he adds, "Let us offer up its first-fruits, which is ourselves." The Apostle too instructs us: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1).

**Bright Tuesday, May 7: Our Daily Paschal Reader – Reading #3: The Spiritual Witness of the Saints of Gaza: St. Dorotheus of Gaza - “This is the Day of Resurrection” – Part 3**

**This is the day of resurrection...**

Let us offer our own selves,  
the possession most precious to God and closest to Him.  
Let us give back to the Image that which is according to the image,  
recognizing our value, honoring the Archetype,  
knowing the power of the mystery and for whom Christ died.

**[St Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 1 – “On Pascha”]**

What sort of gift ought we offer to Christ in order to please Him **on the day of his Resurrection**, if he does not desire the sacrifice of senseless animals?

St. Gregory in his teaching tells us the answer, for after saying, **“It is the Day of Resurrection,”** he adds, “Let us offer up its first-fruits, which is ourselves.” The Apostle too instructs us: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1).

How then ought we to make an offering of our bodies as a “living sacrifice to God?” By no longer following our physical desires and our own ideas,” (Eph 2:3), but “walking in the spirit and not fulfilling the desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:16. “For this is to mortify our earthly members” (Col 3:5). This is what is meant by a living sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God.

But why a living sacrifice? Because an animal destined for sacrifice, by the very fact that it becomes a sacrificial victim, dies. But the saints who offer themselves to God, offer themselves alive, every day—as David says, “For your sake we are put to death all the day long, we are considered as sheep for the slaughter” (Ps 44:22).<sup>13</sup> St Gregory says, “Let us offer ourselves as first-fruits [of the Resurrection]”, that is, let us sacrifice ourselves, let us die to ourselves all the day long, as did all the saints, for the sake of Christ our God. How did they put themselves to death? By not loving the world or what is in the world (1 Jn 2:15) —as it says in the Catholic Epistles, “By rejecting the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life” (1 Jn 2:16), that is, the love of pleasures, the love of money and of vainglory, and taking up the Cross and following Christ and crucifying the world to themselves and themselves to the world (Mt 16:24). About this the Apostle says, “Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:24). This is how the saints put themselves to death.

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**Bright Wednesday, May 8: Our Daily Paschal Reader – Reading #4: The Spiritual Witness of the Saints of Gaza: St. Dorotheus of Gaza - “This is the Day of Resurrection” – Part 4**

**This is the day of resurrection...**

Let us offer our own selves,  
the possession most precious to God and closest to Him.  
Let us give back to the Image that which is according to the image,  
recognizing our value, honoring the Archetype,  
knowing the power of the mystery and for whom Christ died.

**[St Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 1 – “On Pascha”]**

**St. Dorotheus of Gaza**

St. Gregory says, “Let us offer ourselves as first-fruits [of the Resurrection]’, that is, let us sacrifice ourselves, let us die to ourselves all the day long, as did all the saints, for the sake of Christ our God.”

But how did they offer themselves up? By not living for themselves, but reducing themselves to servitude to God's commandments and putting away their own will for the sake of the command and love of God and their neighbor. As Saint Peter says, “Behold we have given up everything and followed you” (Mt 19:27). He had no possessions, riches or gold or silver, he only had his net and that was very old, as said St John Chrysostom (Homily 7 in Romans; Cassian, Conf. 30). But, as he also said, he did give up all his own aspirations, all desire of having the things of this world, and it is clear that had he had riches or power, he would have despised them and taken up his cross to follow Christ according to the word, “I live, yet no longer I, but now Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). This is how the saints offered themselves up, putting themselves to death, as we were saying, in regard to all their passionate desires and doing their own will and living solely for Christ and his commandments.

So then for us! Let us offer ourselves as St Gregory teaches us. For he wants us to be “God's most precious children.” Truly man is, of all visible creatures, the most precious. All other things the Creator brought into being by His word alone, saying, “Let it be”—and there it was; “Let there be the earth” and it was made, “let there be the waters’ and so forth (Gen 1:3). But man he fashioned and formed with his own hands; and he established all the rest of creation for the service and comfort of man whom he set up as ruler and let him enjoy all the delights of paradise (Gen 2). And what is even more astonishing! When man fell from there through his own fault, God called him back again through the blood of his only begotten Son, so that of all the visible creatures man should be the most precious. And not only the most precious, but also “the most closely related,” for he said, “let us make man to our own image and likeness” (Gen 1:26), and again, “God created man in his own image and likeness and breathed into his person the breath of life” (Gen 2:17).

**Bright Thursday, May 9: Our Daily Paschal Reader – Reading #5: The Spiritual Witness of the Saints of Gaza: St. Dorotheus of Gaza - “This is the Day of Resurrection” – Part 5**

**This is the day of resurrection...**

Let us offer our own selves,  
the possession most precious to God and closest to Him.  
Let us give back to the Image that which is according to the image,  
recognizing our value, honoring the Archetype,  
knowing the power of the mystery and for whom Christ died.  
[St Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 1 – “On Pascha”]

**St. Dorotheus of Gaza**

Our Lord himself, having made Himself a home among us, took up the person of a man, the body of a man, the mind of a man—in short, he became a man in everything except sin. He became our neighbor as a man, as it were, made Himself the same as us. This was beautifully and graciously expressed by St. Gregory in saying that man was the most precious and nearly related to God. Then he adds, even more clearly, “Let us give back to the Image that which is according to the image.” How can we do that? Let us learn from the Apostle who says, “Let us purify ourselves from all defilement both of flesh and of spirit” (2 Cor 7:1). Let us make clean and clear the likeness as we received it. Let us separate from it the dirt of sin, so that it may appear in all its beauty through the virtues.

David, in his prayer about this beauty [power] says, “Lord, by Your will, give reality to my beauty” (Ps 29:8). Let us therefore, purify our own likeness [to God]. God wants this from us, as He gave it “not having spot or wrinkle, or any such blemish” (Eph 5:27). “Let us give back to the Image that which is according to the image, recognizing our value.” Let us try to understand something of the great good by which we have been honored; let us try to understand something of the likeness to which we were created. Let us not despise the great gifts He has given us for no other reason than His goodness, not for any worth of ours. Let us be convinced that we are made to the image of the God who made us. “Let us honor our Archetype.” Let us not wantonly insult the Archetype to which we were created. What man intending to paint the Emperor would be bold enough to lay on moldy colors in his picture, and so dishonor the Emperor, and be punished? Would not all the colors he used be precious and brilliant and worthy of the imperial portrait? Sometimes even gold leaf is used in pictures of emperors; and great care is taken to portray as accurately as possible the royal robes he is wearing, so that anyone seeing the portrait may grasp the whole character of the emperor and may consider that he all but saw the emperor himself, the very exemplar [from which it was painted]. Likewise, we should not dishonor our model. We were created in the image and likeness of God, so let us make that likeness clean and precise, worthy of our Exemplar (our Archetype). If the man who dishonors the portrait of the emperor—a visible being of our own race though he is—is punished, what ought we to suffer for despising the likeness of God in us and not, as St Gregory says, “giving back to the Image that which is according to the image”? Let us, therefore, give honor to our Exemplar, our Archetype.

**Bright Friday, May 10: Our Daily Paschal Reader – Reading #6: The Spiritual Witness of the Saints of Gaza: St. Dorotheus of Gaza - “This is the Day of Resurrection” – Final Section – Part #6**

**This is the day of resurrection...**

Let us offer our own selves,  
the possession most precious to God and closest to Him.  
Let us give back to the Image that which is according to the image,  
recognizing our value, honoring the Archetype,  
knowing the power of the mystery and for whom Christ died.  
[St Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 1 – “On Pascha”]

**St. Dorotheus of Gaza**

“Let us come to know the power of the mystery and for whom Christ died.”

The power of the mystery of Christ lies in this: By sin we have effaced what belongs to his likeness in us and so we were put to death, as the Apostle says, “by our sins and our transgressions” (Eph 2:1). God, having made us like Himself and having compassion on His own creation and His own likeness, became man for our sakes and Himself accepted death in our stead in order to lead us, who were dead, back again to the life from which we had fallen away.

When He mounted the holy cross, He nailed to the cross that sin for which we were thrown out of Paradise, and “led captivity captive” as it is written (Eph 4:8; Ps 68:18).

What does it mean: “leading captivity captive”? In consequence of the fall of Adam, our enemy captured us and held us in his power. From then on the souls of men, on leaving the body, went to hades, because they were shut out from paradise. Christ, therefore, when he was lifted high on the holy and life-giving cross, snatched us by His own blood from the captivity by which the enemy had enslaved us through our fall. In other words, He seized us again from the hand of the enemy and, as it were, made us His own captives by defeating and casting down the one who had captured us before. This is the reason why he is said to have “led captivity captive.”

This is the power of the mystery; this is why Christ died for us: to lead us, who, as the saint says, were dead back to life. We were, therefore, snatched from hades through the loving kindness of Christ, and now it is within our power to go back into paradise. Our enemy no longer has tyrannical power over us as he did at first; no longer does he hold us as his slaves.

The one thing is – we must be attentive and keep ourselves from sin in every one of our actions. For, as I have said many times before, every sinful action we take puts us once again under the power of the enemy, since of our own free will we cast ourselves down [before him] and enslave ourselves [to him]. For is it not a shameful thing and a great misery, if—after Christ has delivered us from hell through his blood and after we know this to be true—we go back again and cast ourselves into hell? Are we not worthy of worse and more pitiable punishment?

May God, who loves us, have pity on us and give us the childlike simplicity to understand this and help ourselves, that we may find a little mercy [waiting for us] on the day of judgment.

**Bright Saturday – St. Thomas Sunday, May 11-12: Our Daily Paschal Reader – Reading #7 – In Preparation for the Best Hymns of Pascha – Oration 1 by St. Gregory of Nazianzus**

Yesterday we heard the last of our readings from the Spiritual Fathers of Gaza – **St. Dorotheus of Gaza's** reflection entitled, "**Commentary on an Easter Hymn of St. Gregory of Nazianzus.**"

St. Dorotheus's discourse written in the late 500s is considered the first commentary on St. Gregory's sermon – his first as a priest (Oration 1), delivered on Pascha, 362.

Here's some background on **St. Gregory**:

<https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2024/01/25/100298-saint-gregory-the-theologian-archbishop-of-constantinople>

St. Gregory was ordained in 361 by his father, Gregory, but suddenly left his father and their community after his ordination before the original offering of this Sermon.

In delivering this upon his return in 362, the Sermon celebrates Christ's resurrection, cements Gregory's reconciliation with his father and the congregation – and already articulates major themes in his theology and spirituality (Sister Nonna Harrison).

This week we'll hear some of the best known hymns of Pascha, several of them developing themes which were first expressed in this Sermon.

### **ORATION 1**

#### ***On Pascha and on His Slowness***

**1 It is the day of resurrection** and an auspicious beginning. **Let us be made brilliant by the feast and embrace each other. Let us call brothers even those who hate us** (Is 66:5), and much more those who have done or suffered anything out of love for us. **Let us concede all things to the resurrection. Let us grant pardon to each other**, I who have been tyrannized by the good tyranny—for I add this now—and you who have tyrannized me well, if you blamed me in anything for my slowness, since perhaps it is better and more honorable than the quickness of others. For it is good both to draw back from God a little, like great Moses of old (Ex 4:33) and Jeremiah later (Jer 1:6), and to run readily toward the one who calls, like Aaron (Ex 4:27), and Isaiah (Is 6:8), provided both are done piously, the first because of one's own weakness and the second because of the power of the one who calls.

**2** A mystery anointed me. I drew back a little from the mystery, long enough to examine myself. And I enter with a mystery, bringing this good day as an ally for my cowardice and weakness, that he who today is risen from the dead may also make me new by the Spirit, and clothing me with the new human being' may give to the new creation,' to those born according to God (John 1:13), a good molder and teacher, one who willingly both dies with Christ and rises with him (Rom 6:8).

3 Yesterday the lamb was slaughtered, and the doorposts were anointed, and the Egyptians lamented the firstborn, and the destroyer passed over us, and the seal was awesome and venerable, and we were walled in by the precious blood. Today we have totally escaped Egypt and Pharaoh the harsh despot and the burdensome overseers, and we have been freed from the clay and the brick-making. And nobody hinders us from celebrating a feast of exodus for the Lord our God and keeping feast "not with the old leaven of malice and wickedness but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Cor 5:8), bringing nothing of the Egyptian and godless dough (Ex 12:34).

**4 Yesterday I was crucified with Christ, today I am glorified with him; yesterday I died with him, today I am made alive with him; yesterday I was buried with him, today I rise with him.** But let us make an offering to the one who died and rose again for us. Perhaps you think I am speaking of gold or silver or tapestries or transparent precious stones, earthly matter that is in flux and remains below, of which the greater part always belongs to evil people and slaves of things below and of the ruler of this world" (John 14:30). Let us offer our own selves, the possession most precious to God and closest to him. Let us give back to the Image that which is according to the image, recognizing our value, honoring the Archetype, knowing the power of the mystery and for whom Christ died.

**5 Let us become like Christ, since Christ also became like us; let us become gods because of him, since he also because of us became human. He assumed what is worse that he might give what is better. He became poor that we through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). He took the form of a slave (Phil 2:7), that we might regain freedom (Rom 8:21). He descended that we might be lifted up, he was tempted that we might be victorious, he was dishonored to glorify us, he died to save us, he ascended to draw to himself us who lay below in the Fall of sin. Let us give everything, offer everything, to the one who gave himself as a ransom and an exchange for us (Matt 20:28, 16:26).** But one can give nothing comparable to oneself, understanding the mystery and becoming because of him everything that he became because of us.

6 He offers you, as you see, a shepherd, for this is what the good shepherd (Note: Gregory is speaking of his father, Gregory the Elder) who lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:15) hopes and prays and asks for you who are under his authority. And he gives you himself double instead of single and makes the staff of his old age a staff of the spirit and adds to the inanimate temple a living temple (the church that both Gregory and his father built). To this most beautiful and heavenly edifice he adds one of any old kind and stature, yet to him most precious, which he completed with many sweats and labors. If only one could say it was also worthy of such labors! All that is his he gives to you. What magnanimity, or, to speak more truly, what love for his children! He gives you grey hairs, youth, the temple, the high priest, the testator, the heir, the discourses you have desired. And these discourses are not such as are haphazard and poured into the air and stop at the ear but are those the Spirit writes and engraves on tablets of stone, or indeed of flesh (2 Cor 3:2-3), not scratched onto the surface or easily effaced but inscribed into the depth, not with ink but with grace.

7 So these things are given you by this venerable Abraham, this patriarch, this honored and respected head, this dwelling place of every good, this standard of virtue, this perfection of priesthood, who today is bringing to God the willing sacrifice, his only son, the one born of the promise (Gen 22:2). But as for you, offer both to God and to us a willingness to be shepherded well,



abiding in a place of verdure and nurtured by waters of rest (Ps 23:2), knowing the shepherd well and being known by him, and following when as a shepherd and a free man he calls you through the door, but not following a stranger (John 10:7-8) who trespasses into the front courtyard as a thief and a conspirator, nor hearing a strange voice that would steal the flock by stealth and scatter it away from the truth in mountains and deserts and chasms and places that the Lord does not visit, and lead it away from the sound faith, that is faith in Father and Son and Holy Spirit, the one divinity and power—to this teaching my sheep have always listened, and may they always listen—and whose falsified and corrupted words would lead it captive and tear it away from the first and true Shepherd. From these words may we all be far, both shepherd and flock, as from toxic and deadly grass, as we are led to pasture and lead to pasture, that we all may be one (John 17:21) in Christ Jesus, now and unto the repose hereafter. To him be glory and sovereignty unto the ages. Amen.

**Monday, May 13 – Our Daily Paschal Reader – *The Paschal Canon and St. John of Damascus: Ode 1 – This is the Day of Resurrection***

Starting this week, we'll focus on the best known and loved hymns from the Paschal Service that we'll continue to sing until Ascension.

The first group – sung initially during the Matins of Pascha (once we have returned to the church after the procession) – is called the "**Paschal Canon**" and is attributed to **St. John of Damascus** (675-749) who, as we will see, developed themes from the **Orations (Sermons)** of **St. Gregory Nazianzus**.

Here's a link to learn more about St. John:

<https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2024/12/04/103473-venerable-john-of-damascus>



***St. John of Damascus (from the Princeton University Chapel)***

The **Canon** form – presented during Matins – the singing of nine sections of the Bible known as **odes**, or **canticles**. Here are the Biblical texts:

1. The Song of Moses: Exod. 15: 1-19
2. The Song of Moses: Deut. 32: 1-43 [Note: This Ode is usually not sung]
3. The Song of Hannah: i Kings. [1 Sam.] 2:1-10
4. The Prayer of Habakkuk: Hab. 3:1-19
5. The Prayer of Isaiah: Isa. 26:9-20
6. The Prayer of Jonah: Jonah 2:3-10
7. The Prayer of the Three Holy Children: Dan. 3:26-56 (LXX - Septuagint)
8. The Song of the Three Holy Children: Dan. 3:57-88 (LXX)
9. The Song of the Mother of God (the Magnificat): Luke 1:46-55, and the Song of Zachariah (the Benedictus): Luke 1:68-79

It may sound a little confusing, but each section of the Canon is built around an individual **Biblical Ode** whose initial hymn - called the **irmos** – sets the pattern for the rest of the **troparia in that unit**.

### ***The Paschal Canon***

[Note: The following commentary on **St. John of Damascus and the Paschal Canon** comes from Andrew Louth, “John the Poet,” in: **St. John Damascene – Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology**. Louth attributes the insights to **St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain** (originally published in 1836).]

### **Ode/Irmos I**

This is the day of resurrection.  
Let us be illumined, O people.  
Pascha, the Pascha of the Lord.  
For from death to life and from earth to heaven has Christ our God led us,  
as we sing the song of victory.

### **Troparia**

Let us purify our senses and we shall see Christ  
shining in the unapproachable light of His resurrection.  
We shall clearly hear Him say:  
Rejoice, as we sing the song of victory.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice.  
Let the whole world, visible and invisible, keep the feast.  
For Christ is risen, our eternal joy.  
Christ is risen from the dead...(3x).

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Nicodemus points out how the **irmos** is constructed by John from two passages from **St. Gregory Nazianzus's two homilies for Pascha, Oration 1 (on Pascha and on his slowness)** and the last, **Oration 45 (On Holy Pascha)**.

From the first homily, John takes the opening words: “

**"This is the day of resurrection, . . . let us be illumined."**

From the last homily, John takes, **"Pascha, the Pascha of the Lord;** in fact, as Nikodimos points out, in St. Gregory's original homily, his words are: **"The Lord's Pascha, Pascha, and again I will say Pascha, to the honor of the Trinity."**

John also takes from Gregory the explanation of the word **pascha**, derived not from the Greek word, **paschein**, to suffer, but from the Hebrew, **pesach**, **"passover,"** referring to the passing over from Egypt to Canaan, but spiritually **"from things below to things above and to the land of promise"** (Oration 45:10). This makes the link with the first ode, Moses' song of deliverance after crossing the Red Sea (Exod. 15: 1-19). A few words and an idea from Gregory provide John with the materials for his first irmos, which sets the tone for the whole Canon.

According to Nicodemus, the first of the troparia is based on the notion that humankind is a twofold being, with both bodily and spiritual senses: a theme close to John's heart. More precisely, Nicodemus finds in Gregory's last homily the notion that the paschal sacrifice is offered **"for the purification of the senses"** (Oration 45:14). Only if purified can we see Christ **"shining in the unapproachable light of His resurrection."**

For the second troparion, Nicodemus again refers us to Gregory Nazianzus, this time his homily on the Theophany, where he quotes Psalm 95:11: **"Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad"** (Oration 38 - 1:4) and to the last homily for the rejoicing of the whole cosmos, seen and unseen.

The whole universe, seen and unseen, refers either to the angels and human kind, or perhaps, Nicodemus suggests, even to the inanimate elements. John, in common with other Fathers such as St. Maximus the Confessor, affirms the truly cosmic dimension of Christ's victorious resurrection.

The tone of triumph and rejoicing that runs through these troparia chimes in well with the theme of the biblical ode they accompany, the **Song of Moses**:

'I will sing to the Lord for gloriously has He been glorified;  
the horse and the rider he has thrown into the sea.  
The Lord is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation"  
(Exod. 15: 1-2).

These are themes that are fresh in the memories of those who hear and sing this Canon, for the **Song of Moses** is part of the **Vespertine Liturgy of Holy Saturday**.

***Biblical Ode 1***  
**(Exodus 15:1-21)**

15 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:

“I will sing to the Lord, for gloriously has He been glorified;  
the horse and rider He has thrown into the sea.

2

The Lord is my strength and my song,  
and He has become my salvation;  
this is my God, and I will praise Him,  
my father’s God, and I will exalt Him.

3

The Lord is a warrior;  
the Lord is his name.

4

“Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he cast into the sea;  
his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea.<sup>[b]</sup>

5

The floods covered them;  
they went down into the depths like a stone.

6

Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power—  
your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy.

7

In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries;  
you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble.

8

At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up,  
the floods stood up in a heap;  
the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

9

The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake,  
I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them.  
I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.’

10

You blew with your wind, the sea covered them;  
they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

11

“Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?  
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,  
awesome in splendor, doing wonders?

12

You stretched out your right hand,  
the earth swallowed them.

13

“In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed;  
you guided them by your strength to your holy abode.

14

The peoples heard, they trembled;  
pangs seized the inhabitants of Philistia.

15

Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed;  
trembling seized the leaders of Moab;  
all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away.

16

Terror and dread fell upon them;  
by the might of your arm, they became still as a stone  
until your people, O Lord, passed by,  
until the people whom you acquired passed by.

17

You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession,  
the place, O Lord, that you made your abode,  
the sanctuary, O Lord, that your hands have established.

18

The Lord will reign forever and ever.”

19 When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea,  
the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea  
on dry ground.

20 Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women  
went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. 21 And Miriam sang to them:

“Sing to the Lord, for gloriously has He been glorified;;  
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.”

**Tuesday, May 14 – Our Daily Paschal Reader – The Paschal Canon and St. John of Damascus:  
Ode 3 – “The Fount of Incorruption”**

Good morning:

Christ is risen!

Here are some insights about **St. John of Damascus** from the Vespers for his feast on December 4:



What shall I call you, divine sweetly-speaking John:  
most radiant star,  
one whose sight is illuminated by the lightning flash of the Trinity?  
You entered into the dark cloud of the Spirit;  
You were initiated into the ineffable mysteries of the Divine;  
Like Moses you made things clear in the beautiful language of the Muses.  
Intercede that our souls may be saved.

### Ode/Irmos 3

Come, let us drink,  
not miraculous water drawn forth from a barren stone,  
but a new vintage from the fount of incorruption,  
springing from the tomb of Christ.  
In Him we are established.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

Now all is filled with light:  
heaven and earth and the lower regions.  
Let all creation celebrate the rising of Christ.  
In Him we are established.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

Yesterday I was buried with You, O Christ.  
Today I arise with You in Thy resurrection.  
Yesterday I was crucified with You.  
Glorify me with You, O Savior, in Your kingdom. [Christ is risen... is sung 3 times)

The **Biblical foundation of Ode 3 is the Prayer of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10/ 1 Kings 2:1-10 LXX)** - which is included at the end of this reflection).

The reference to the **“new drink or vintage”** is possibly meant to recall that when Eli, finding Hannah in the Temple, accused her of being drunk, she replied, **“I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord”** (1 Kings 1:15).

More immediately it relates to the water Moses struck from the rock during the desert wandering:

“And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?” 11 **Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly**, and the congregation and their animals drank. (Num. 20:10-11),

but this is **“incorruption's source,”** echoing (or more probably the origin of) the communion hymn during Easter: **“Receive the body of Christ, taste the Fountain of Immortality, Alleluia.”**

**“In Him we are established”** is a reference to the beginning of Hannah's song: **“My heart is established in the Lord”** (1 Kings 2:1).

The first troparion returns to the cosmic theme, introduced in the Ode 1. With the Resurrection, light has come, not just to heaven and earth, but also to the region beneath the earth, Hades,



which was redeemed by Christ's descent there on Holy Saturday. Here we have a first allusion to the theme of the icon of the Resurrection, in which Christ is seen, breaking the gates of Hades, and bringing out those imprisoned there, beginning with Adam and Eve.

The second troparion, as Nicodemus points out, is derived from a passage in Gregory's first homily: **"Yesterday I was crucified with Christ, today I am glorified with Him; yesterday I died with Him, today I am given life with Him; yesterday I was buried with him, today I am raised with Him."** But John has altered the order, unhistorically placing burial before crucifixion. The reason, Nicodemus suggests, is that John is concerned with what happens to us, with whom resurrection precedes glorification.

This sharing with Christ in burial and crucifixion has three references, Nicodemus suggests:

- 1) to our ascetic burial with Christ through the Lenten Fast;
- 2) to Christ's identification with us in the Incarnation; and
- 3) to those baptized during Easter night.

***Biblical Canticle 3: The Prayer of Hannah***  
**(1 Samuel 2:1-10; LXX 1 Kings 2:1-10)**

2 And Hannah prayed and said:

"My heart rejoices (is established) in the Lord;  
My horn is exalted in the Lord.  
I smile at my enemies,  
Because I rejoice in Your salvation.

2

"No one is holy like the Lord,  
For there is none besides You,  
Nor is there any rock like our God.

3

"Talk no more so very proudly;  
Let no arrogance come from your mouth,  
For the Lord is the God of knowledge;  
And by Him actions are weighed.

4

"The bows of the mighty men are broken,  
And those who stumbled are girded with strength.

5

Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,  
And the hungry have ceased to hunger.  
Even the barren has borne seven,  
And she who has many children has become feeble.

6

"The Lord kills and makes alive;  
He brings down to the grave and brings up.

7

The Lord makes poor and makes rich;  
He brings low and lifts up.

8

He raises the poor from the dust  
And lifts the beggar from the ash heap,  
To set them among princes  
And make them inherit the throne of glory.  
“For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s,  
And He has set the world upon them.

9

He will guard the feet of His saints,  
But the wicked shall be silent in darkness.  
“For by strength no man shall prevail.

10

The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces;  
From heaven He will thunder against them.  
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth.  
“He will give strength to His king,  
And exalt the horn of His anointed.”

**Wednesday, May 15 – Our Daily Paschal Reader – The Paschal Canon and St. John of Damascus:  
Ode 4 - “Standing in Holy Vigil”**

As we continue to think this week of the Paschal Canon and the spirituality creativity of St John of Damascus in weaving together elements of the Scriptures and phrases from St Gregory of Nazianzus it is interesting to consider this opening line in Fr Andrew Louth’s book, *“St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology”*:

“Originality means to remain faithful to the originals.”

Zissimos Lorenzatos

**Ode 4/Irmos 4**

The inspired prophet Habakkuk now stands with us in holy vigil.  
He is like a shining angel who cries with a piercing voice:  
Today salvation has come to the world,  
for Christ is risen as all-powerful.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

Christ our Pascha has appeared as a male child,  
the son that opens a virgin womb.  
He is called the Lamb as one destined to be our food,  
unblemished for He has not tasted of defilement,  
and perfect for He is our true God.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

Christ, the crown with which we are blessed,  
has appeared as a yearling lamb.  
Freely He has given Himself as our cleansing paschal sacrifice.  
From the tomb He has shown forth once again,  
our radiant sun of righteousness.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

David, the ancestor of God, leaped and danced before the ark which prefigured You.  
Now let us, the holy people of God,  
seeing the fulfillment of all figures,  
rejoice in piety, for Christ is risen as all-powerful.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead (3 times).

+

The fourth ode is the Prayer of Habakkuk (Hab. 3:1-19). But, as is often the case in the canons, the reference is more immediately to where Habakkuk was standing when he made his prayer, which is found in

Habakkuk 2:1 –

“I will stand on my watch, and get up on a rock” (LXX).

But, as Nikodimos notes, John arrives at this reference by way of the opening of St. Gregory of Nazianzus’s last homily (Oration 45). Gregory opens by quoting Habakkuk’s words about standing at his watch, and says what he sees today, that is the day of Pascha: a vision of a man raised on the clouds, looking like an angel, with his clothes shining like lightning, crying out in a loud voice,

“Today salvation has come for the world. . . .  
Today, Christ is risen from the dead, let us be raised with him.”

The first troparion dwells on Christ our Pascha, sacrificed for us (cf. 1 Cor. 5 : 7). The paschal lamb was to be “without blemish, male, a year old” (Exod. 12: 5); John glosses this with Exodus 34:19, about the male that opens the womb belonging to God. He also recalls another passage from Gregory's Easter homily: “for us the lamb is eaten.”

With these references, John puts together his troparion, meditating on Christ's sacrifice.

The second troparion continues this theme, laying stress on the voluntary nature of Christ's sacrifice. Again, John draws on Gregory's Easter homily, where he says of Christ as the paschal sacrifice: “a year old, like the sun of righteousness, setting out from there [heaven], circumscribed in his visible nature, and returning to himself, and the “blessed crown of goodness,” being on every side equal to Himself and alike; and not only this, but also as giving life to the circle of the virtues, gently mingled and mixed with each other, by the law of love and order.” Here are all John's themes for this troparion. There is also a play on words, as Nikodimos points out, in that the word translated “good” in the troparion, is pronounced exactly like the word Christ (*christos/chrestos*).

The last troparion refers to David dancing before the ark (2 Kings 6:16-19). David celebrated what was simply a shadow of what was to come; Christians celebrate the fulfillment. “Full of God, let us rejoice”: for this Nikodimos refers to a passage in Gregory's homily for the Theophany: “Let us celebrate, not as for a pagan festival, but divinely, not in a worldly manner, but in a manner that transcends the world” (Oration 38).

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***Biblical Canticle 4: The Prayer of Habakkuk (3:1-19)***

2

O Lord, I have heard Your speech and was afraid;  
O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years!  
In the midst of the years make it known;  
In wrath remember mercy.

3

God came from Teman,  
The Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah  
His glory covered the heavens,  
And the earth was full of His praise.

4

His brightness was like the light;  
He had rays flashing from His hand,  
And there His power was hidden.

5

Before Him went pestilence,  
And fever followed at His feet.

6

He stood and measured the earth;  
He looked and startled the nations.  
And the everlasting mountains were scattered,  
The perpetual hills bowed.  
His ways are everlasting.

7

I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction;  
The curtains of the land of Midian trembled.

8

O Lord, were You displeased with the rivers,  
Was Your anger against the rivers,  
Was Your wrath against the sea,  
That You rode on Your horses,  
Your chariots of salvation?

9

Your bow was made quite ready;  
Oaths were sworn over Your [b]arrows. Selah  
You divided the earth with rivers.

10

The mountains saw You and trembled;  
The overflowing of the water passed by.  
The deep uttered its voice,  
And lifted its hands on high.

11

The sun and moon stood still in their habitation;  
At the light of Your arrows they went,  
At the shining of Your glittering spear.

12

You marched through the land in indignation;  
You [c]trampled the nations in anger.

13

You went forth for the salvation of Your people,  
For salvation with Your Anointed.  
You struck the head from the house of the wicked,  
By laying bare from foundation to neck. Selah

14

You thrust through with his own arrows  
The head of his villages.  
They came out like a whirlwind to scatter me;  
Their rejoicing was like feasting on the poor in secret.

15

You walked through the sea with Your horses,  
Through the heap of great waters.

16

When I heard, my body trembled;  
My lips quivered at the voice;  
Rottenness entered my bones;  
And I trembled in myself,  
That I might rest in the day of trouble.  
When he comes up to the people,  
He will invade them with his troops.

17

Though the fig tree may not blossom,  
Nor fruit be on the vines;  
Though the labor of the olive may fail,  
And the fields yield no food;  
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,  
And there be no herd in the stalls—

18

Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,  
I will joy in the God of my salvation.

19

[d]The Lord God is my strength;  
He will make my feet like deer's feet,  
And He will make me walk on my high hills.

Thursday, May 16 – Our Daily Paschal Reader – The Paschal Canon and St. John of Damascus:  
*Ode 5 - “Let us bring a hymn instead of myrrh”*



**Ode 5/Irmos 5**

Let us arise at the rising of the sun and bring to the Master a hymn instead of myrrh,  
and we shall see Christ, the sun of righteousness,  
who causes life to dawn for all.

Response: Christ is risen from the dead.

**Troparia**

The souls bound in the chains of hell, O Christ,  
seeing Your compassion without measure,  
pressed onward to the light with joyful steps,  
praising the eternal Pascha.

Response: Christ is risen from the dead.

Let us go with lamps in hand to meet Christ,  
who comes from the tomb like a bridegroom.  
And with the festive ranks of angels,  
let us celebrate the saving Pascha of God.

Response: Christ is risen from the dead... (3 times)

The fifth ode, the **Prayer of Isaiah** (Isa. 26:9-20), begins, “**By night my spirit watches for You, O God**” (Isa. 26:9 LXX). John's mind naturally goes to the myrrhbearing women, the first witnesses of the Resurrection. The watching by night of the vigil, in which this canon is sung, is related to women coming to the sepulcher “in the early dawn” (Luke 24:1).

Isaiah's prayer closes by celebrating the redemption of the dead: **"The dead shall arise. Those in the tombs shall awake. All those on earth shall greatly rejoice"** (Isa. 26: 19).

We heard this affirmation clearly expressed in **Irmos 5 of the Matins Canon for Holy Saturday** (sung again during the Nocturns Service on Pascha night):

**Isaiah saw the never-setting light of Your compassionate manifestation to us as God, O Christ.**

**Rising early from the night he cried out:**

**"The dead shall arise. Those in the tombs shall awake.**

**All those on earth shall greatly rejoice."**

This theme is picked up in the troparia, the first of which returns to the theme of the redemption of Hades; John sees those who were bound pressing forward to Christ, as they are depicted in the icon of the Resurrection. The theme of rejoicing is tied to that of a wedding banquet, a favorite symbol of the coming of the Kingdom in the Gospel parables. Christ's tomb becomes a bridal chamber, from which he emerges as in the verse of the psalm (Ps. 18/19:6):

The bride He has made His own is the Church.

***Biblical Cantic 5: The Prayer of Isaiah (26:9-19)***

**By night my spirit watches for You, O God, for Your commands are a light upon the earth.**

Learn righteousness, you who dwell on the earth.

The ungodly man ceases; he will not learn righteousness on the earth;

he will not do the truth;

let the ungodly man be taken away, that he may not see the glory of the Lord.

O Lord, Your arm is exalted, but they did not know it.

But when they know it, they shall be ashamed, for jealousy will seize an untaught people; and now fire will devour the adversaries.

O Lord, our God, grant us peace, for You render everything to us.

O Lord, our God, possess us;

O Lord, we know no other besides You; we name Your name.

The dead will not see life; neither will physicians raise them.

Therefore You brought evils upon them, O Lord, on the glorious ones of the earth.

O Lord, I remembered You in my hard circumstances.

Your chastening to us was a small affliction.

As a woman with child is in pain and cries out in her pangs, when she draws near the time of her delivery,

so we become Your beloved because of Your fear, O Lord.

We have been with child, we have been in pain, and we have given birth.

We brought forth the spirit of Your salvation on the earth.

But the inhabitants of the world shall fall.

**The dead shall arise. Those in the tombs shall awake.**

**All those on earth shall greatly rejoice,** for your dew is a healing for them, but the land of the ungodly shall come to an end.



**Friday, May 17 – Our Daily Paschal Reader – The Paschal Canon and St. John of Damascus:  
Ode 6 - “Descending to the depths of the earth”**

**Ode 6/Irmos**



**You descended, O Christ, to the depths of the earth.**

You broke the everlasting bars which had held death's captives,  
and like Jonah from the whale on the third day,  
You arose from the grave.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

You arose, O Christ, and yet the tomb remained sealed,  
as at Your birth the Virgin's womb remained unharmed;  
and You have opened for us the gates of paradise.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead.

O my Savior, as God You brought Yourself freely to the Father,  
a victim living and unsacrificed,  
resurrecting Adam, the father of us all,  
when You rose from the grave.

Refrain: Christ is risen from the dead...(3x)

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The sixth Ode is the Prayer of Jonah from the belly of the whale. The Lord's reference to the "sign of Jonah," the prefiguring of His death and resurrection after three days by Jonah's three days in the whale (Matt. 12:

29-30), provides the obvious link between the Ode and the Resurrection, the subject of the the Paschal canon. Jonah himself says, "**I went down into the earth, whose bars held me fast eternally**" (Jonah 2:7 (LXX) ), thus comparing his fate with descent into Hades. It is this that John picks up here: for Christ went down into the "deepest parts of the earth" and shattered the bars that held fast those in Hades. Again, in this Irmos, it is the theme of the Resurrection icon to which John returns.

The first troparion draws a parallel between Christ's rising from the sepulcher without breaking the seals and His being born from the Virgin Mother of God without harming her virginity, her *virginitas in partu* (Mary's perpetual virginity) which the Fathers saw prefigured in the gate of the Temple in Ezekiel's vision, which "shall remain shut, . . . for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it" (Ezek. 44: 2), as Nicodemus points out. By passing through what remains sealed, Christ has opened for us the gates of Paradise.

The second troparion again draws on Gregory's second Easter homily (Oration 45), this time a passage in which Gregory is comparing Christ's sacrifice with sacrifices of the Old Covenant. These latter were not useless, a mere shedding of blood, "but the offering, Christ, who is great and unsacrificed, if I may speak thus, in regard to his first (divine) nature, has been intermingled with the sacrifices of the law and was a purification not for a small part of the inhabited earth or for a short time but for all the world and throughout the ages" (45:13). John picks up Gregory's reference to cosmic salvation with his reference to "all Adam's race."

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### ***Biblical Canticle 6: The Prayer of Jonah (2:2-10)***

2

And from the belly of the sea creature, Jonah prayed to the Lord his God, and said:

3

"I cried out in my affliction to the Lord, my God,  
And He heard my voice:  
Out of the belly of Hades, You heard the cry of my voice.

4

You cast me into the depths of the heart of the sea,  
And rivers encompassed me;  
All Your surging waters and Your waves passed over me.

5

And I said, 'I have been driven away from Your sight;  
Shall I again look with favor toward Your holy temple?'

6

Water is poured over me to my soul;  
The lowest depth encircled me;  
My head plunged into the clefts of the mountains.

7

**I went down into the earth, whose bars held me fast eternally;**

Yet, let my life ascend from corruption, O Lord, my God.

8

When my soul was failing from me, I remembered the Lord.

May my prayer be brought to You, into Your holy temple.

9

Those who follow vanity and lies forsake their own mercy.

10

But with a voice of thanksgiving and praise,

I will sacrifice to You.

As much as I vowed, I shall offer up to You,

To You, the Lord of Deliverance.”