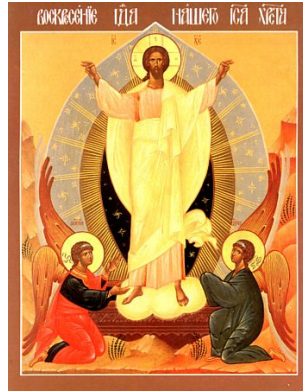


## **Focus on the Faith**

### **From the Cross to the Empty Tomb – the Meaning of Holy Pascha**

By Archpriest Basil Rhodes



In our life as Christians, there is no moment, or feast of the year, that we long for more than the night of Great and Holy Pascha, the night of the Resurrection. And with good reason, for on this night Christ has put an end to the tyranny of death, and to our fear of death, a disease that we all carry in us. On this night, we discover and come to know God in a wholly other way. We discover that He never wished evil for us, or death. We know that there is no longer any need to be afraid of Him, we realize that He loves us, we now know that He did not spare His Son in order to call us from death to life. Christ bears the suffering of our death on the Cross and carries us over with Him “from death to life and from earth to heaven”, He Himself becomes our Pascha.

At the heart of the night, united in prayer, a shiver goes through our heart. Waiting for the voice that calls us to take the holy Light, to receive Christ, and let Him penetrate our very being. Deep down perhaps there are dark regions created by actions, intentions of ours, conflicts, desires, fear! However, Christ comes and says to us: “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev 1, 17-18). We are stunned: what more could we wish for than to get out of death and hell? But what are these keys? What stuff are they? “I am the Resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die!” (Jn 11, 25-6), Christ says to Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, now four days dead and whom He is about to call forth from the tomb. And they believed! This is what Christ asks of us: faith! On the night of the

Resurrection we feel that Christ adds much grace to our fragile faith, and we feel carried, as on wings, to the Resurrection.

And the other key? Forgiveness. On the Cross, the prayer of Christ to the heavenly Father rings out for those who nailed Him to the cross or for those who screamed for His crucifixion, or those going to crucify Him, who call for Him to be placed on the cross, for all these, and those of all time, He cried, and cries on the Cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Lk 23, 34). On the Cross, and after rising from the tomb, Christ also gives us the power to forgive, and He demands that we forgive. How many times does He say to us, that if we do not forgive, we will not be forgiven either? Or invites us to forgive those who hurt us and persecute us, and to pray for them? Or to forgive those who subject us to injustice? It is with confidence that He places the key in our hand. Further, He gives us the power to love: another key that opens the gates of death and hell- love. Remember the commandment to love one’s neighbor that Christ often gives to his apostles: “That you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13, 34-5). And recall what He said to the listening crowds: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven... Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5, 44-8). We can find many of these sayings and commandments of life which Christ gave us as nourishment for our soul. However, today let us leave aside what is said or written, and simply look at Christ on the Cross. In front of us, on the Cross, was and is forever Forgiveness itself, incarnate and crucified, and given to us and to the world in Christ. Before us, on the Cross, is Love itself, crucified: soon neither death nor hell will hold Him any longer. Such are the keys of life which Christ possesses and that He gives to us. Forgiveness has sprung from the tomb for us; Christ’s sacrificial love cannot be entombed by death. We must believe in this love, embrace this love and share this love, always.

***Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!  
Христос Воскресе!***

## **Orthopraxis**

### **Palm Sunday to Pascha: Some Orthodox Customs**

By Archpriest Basil Rhodes

There are many pious and praiseworthy customs and traditions which are practiced in the Orthodox world from Palm Sunday to Pascha - the feast of the Resurrection. These traditions, while not ends in themselves, nonetheless help us to proclaim as well as celebrate our Orthodox Christian faith.

It is a Russian, and generally Slavic custom to hold candles decorated with flowers and pussy willows for Palm Sunday Vigil and Liturgy. Among Arab Orthodox Christians, actual palm branches are carried in procession around the temple at the end of Divine Liturgy on Palm Sunday. Greek Orthodox believers hold crosses woven from either palm branches or bay leaves on Palm Sunday. These are adaptations due to climate in the country of origin of these people.

Greeks greet each other with "*Kali anastasi!*" or "Good Resurrection!" during Holy Week.

In the Russian tradition, the faithful carry home the "Thursday Fire" – taken from the candles that we hold during the reading of the 12 Passion Gospels on Holy Thursday night. This fire is often preserved in a lantern to assist in bringing it home. The flame is used to light the lampada in the family's Icon Corner ("*krasnyy ugol*") where it remains burning for the whole year.

In the Greek tradition, on the other hand, the Paschal light is taken home instead. After the Resurrection service, the faithful do not blow out the candles, but hold them during the entire Paschal Divine Liturgy.

Every time the Troparion "Christ is Risen." is sung or the celebrant exclaims "Christ is risen!" everyone in the congregation lifts his candle high as the choir sings or responds with "Indeed, He is risen!"

After the service, the faithful take the fire home to light the lampadas in front of their icons, and bless the door lintels with candle-black with the sign of the Cross. This recalls the blessing with blood of the lintel and door posts by the children of Israel, so that the angel of death would pass

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over their homes in Exodus chapter 12. At mealtimes, the candle is lit as the family sings "Christ is risen."

The red egg that the priest presents to the faithful at the end of the Paschal Divine Liturgy is an ancient tradition. The egg represents Christ in the tomb. Breaking the egg is symbolic of the Resurrection and the smashing of the gates of hell.

Slavic people and some Greek families observe the tradition of bringing a basket of food to be blessed after the Paschal Divine Liturgy. The basket usually contains bread (made with eggs and milk), cheese, meat, eggs, butter, salt, and other foods that the family plans on having for their Paschal celebration. There should also be a lit candle, symbolizing the Light of Christ.

## **Lives of the Saints**

### **Virgin martyr Theodosia**

Commemorated on April 3

(One of the Getty Icon Banners!)



Once, during a persecution against Christians, which had already lasted for five years, the seventeen-year-old St Theodosia visited condemned Christian prisoners in the Praetorium in Caesarea, Palestine. It was the day of Holy Pascha, and the martyrs spoke about the Kingdom of God. St Theodosia asked them to remember her before the Lord, when they should come to stand before Him.

Soldiers seized her and led her before the governor Urban after seeing the maiden bow to the prisoners. The governor advised her to offer sacrifice to the idols but she refused, confessing her faith in Christ. Then they subjected the saint to cruel tortures, raking her body with iron claws until her bones were exposed.

## St. Nicholas Orthodox Church

The martyr was silent and endured the sufferings with a happy face, and when the governor told her again to offer sacrifice to the idols she answered, "You fool, I have been granted to join the martyrs!" They threw the maiden with a stone about her neck into the sea, but angels rescued her. Then they threw the martyr to the wild beasts to be eaten by them. Seeing that the beasts would not touch her, they cut off her head.

By night St Theodosia appeared to her parents, who had tried to talk their daughter out of her intention to suffer for Christ. She was in bright clothing with a crown upon her head and a luminous gold cross in her hand, and she said, "Behold the great glory of which you wanted to deprive me!"

The Holy Martyr Theodosia of Tyre suffered in the year 307. She is also commemorated on May 29 (the transfer of her relics to Constantinople, and later to Venice).

## Upcoming Events

### Church Clean-up – April 4

We will be having a church clean-up on Saturday, April 4 to ensure that the Church and grounds look wonderful for our Paschal celebrations. Please come join your fellow Parishioners.

### Bake Sale – April 5

Members of the Hospitality committee have prepared kulich and syrny pascha for the Bake Sale on April 5 (Western Palm Sunday). Dear Parish members, please contribute a lenten or non-lenten dessert so this fundraiser for the Church will be successful.

### Pascha – April 19

After the 2 pm Vespers service, Maria Rhodes is again organizing egg hunts and other activities for the children of the Parish and their friends. We will also have a potluck picnic and bring-your-own –meat Barbeque. Perhaps we can persuade Father Basil to serenade us.

### Christening – May 2

A christening will be held at Saint Nicholas. Nika and Tom Wynn's granddaughter and Lydia Narkevich's great granddaughter will be christened on May 2, 2009 at 2:00 PM. A reception with cake and refreshments will immediately follow the service. Please RSVP by April 12 with Nika at (408) 245-1785 if you plan to come for refreshments.

### Parish Feast Day - May 8 and 9

Our Parish Feast Vigil will be held on Friday, May 8 and our Feast day on Saturday, May 9. Bishop Benjamin will be the celebrant.

**The Hospitality Committee needs assistance from many in preparation for the upcoming holidays. Sign-up sheets are on the bulletin board in the Church Hall.**

## Mark your Calendars:

### Rummage Sale – Saturday, May 23

This church fundraiser will be organized by Brooks Szolyga and Nika Wynn. We're hoping to match our performance last year and raise \$1500 (or more!) for St Nicholas. Save your new and gently used items to donate when the time comes. We will not be selling men's and women's clothing but we do need children's clothing.

### Picnic in Mid August

We plan to have the annual picnic at Wildwood Park. Exact date is to be set.

### Church Festival - Oct 3 and 4

Our plan (God is merciful!) is to divide the work effectively so we have a successful festival without exhausting everyone. We will be watching our budget very carefully so that we increase our profit by attracting more guests and spending less.

## **The Theotokos on Holy and Great Friday**

Translated by Matuska Ioanna Callinicos Rhodes  
Edited by Archpriest Basil Rhodes

The most Holy Virgin descends  
From Golgotha that dark night,  
With slow steps, filled with immeasurable pain  
    Only John is by her side  
The nearby rocks shudder  
    At her quiet lamentation,  
Everything around her grows silent  
    Unable to speak,  
The road is hushed, pensive  
    The world is numbed by great pain  
And as they walk in this unseemly place  
    Like shadows passing in the darkness,  
The Virgin quietly sings her funeral dirge  
    As beautifully as she is able to do so.

The mountains and hillsides echo her singing  
    Each tender flow withers and fades  
The Virgin sings her lament on what has become  
    The darkest of days, her soft tears, streaming  
Christ is truly both God and Man, but she,  
    The All-Holy One, is a Mother.  
Now in the distance she hears a voice  
That pierces the calm of this desolate place,  
Oh, What sadness in that voice  
    Who can she be?  
What causes her groaning?  
“What other poor woman must share this pain?”  
“What other poor woman must mourn and sing her dirge  
    at the loss of another child,  
Another mother weeps.  
Yes, A mother sitting alone cast out.  
A mother, shedding dark tears without consolation  
    She, like the Virgin, has lost her son  
    She, this unfortunate one, cannot forget him  
        for a moment  
The All-Holy One saw Christ nailed to the cross  
The other, her son, also hanging from a tree

Oh, how she weeps! Oh how she cries!  
And no one seems to be moved by her tears  
    But, the All-Holy One knows her pain  
    The All-Holy One hears her dirge  
        and goes to meet her  
To offer her words of love and comfort  
With the sweetest of smiles  
    The Mother of Christ says  
“Mother, What is your distress?”  
“Why have you cast yourself down  
    in this dark, deserted place  
You are not the only one  
    To lose the light of your eyes this day  
I have also lost my son  
Now cease your cries and tell me about your son  
The other mother who is guilt ridden  
Lowers her eyes to the ground  
This request wounds her to the core of her being  
    She bows weakly replies,  
“My sister, Judas is his name,  
    My unfortunate son  
And only one mother in the world  
    Can know the knife wound that pierces my soul  
I cast myself to the streets, as if a beggar-woman  
    My God! I should never have aspired,  
    To the dignity of motherhood.”

But the All-Holy One understands  
    She knows her son  
But the Mother of Christ, does not groan  
    She does not leave  
In that moment she leaves her pain behind  
And for the mother of the traitor  
She sheds Her own precious tears.  
She bends and kisses her and strokes her hair,  
And She holds her tenderly and firmly in a warm embrace  
She speaks to her with tender words  
And sweetly calms her soul  
    She gives her courage  
    She gives her strength  
    She raises her from the ground  
“Come,” she says, “Unfortunate one”  
“You must have some rest.”

“Let us go together.”  
“Let us go to my home”  
“You will spend the night with me.”  
“There together, we’ll share our motherly pain.”  
“We’ll mingle our tears and pray.”  
How compassionate is the All-Holy One ?  
And they go forth together,  
Leaning on each other, lost in their pensive thoughts,  
Two mothers, walking in sisterly embrace.  
Yes! Because Christ, Who is hung  
On Golgotha this day  
Gives us the greatest commandment  
“That we should love one another.”