

Orthopraxis

Palm Sunday to Pascha: Orthodox Customs

By Archpriest Basil Rhodes

There are many examples of pious traditions and customs which are practiced by Orthodox Christians in the week from Palm Sunday through Pascha, the feast of the Resurrection.

An Arabic tradition is to hold candles decorated with flowers for Palm Sunday along with palm branches. Greeks hold crosses woven from either palm branches or bay leaves on Palm Sunday. Slavic peoples who come from a cold climate where palm trees do not usually grow receive pussy willow branches on Palm Sunday, which they often call "Willow Sunday."

Greeks greet each other with "kali anastasi" or "Good Resurrection" during Holy Week, just before Pascha.

In the Russian Orthodox tradition, the faithful carry home the "Thursday Fire" - the candles that we hold during the reading of the 12 Passion Gospels on Holy Thursday night. The flame is used to light the lampada (oil vigil lamp) in the family's home icon corner, called the "Beautiful Corner" ("krasny ugol"), where it is tended to and remains burning for the whole year.

However, in the Greek tradition, the Paschal light is the one you carry home. After the Resurrection service, the faithful do not blow out their 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/her candle high as the choir sings or responds with "Indeed, He is risen!" After the



service, the faithful take the fire home and mark lampblack crosses with the flame on the door lintels, as well as light the lampadas in front of their icons. At mealtimes, the candle is lit as the family sings "Christ is risen."

The red egg that the celebrants present to the faithful at the end of the Paschal Divine Liturgy is also a tradition. The egg represents Christ in the tomb. Breaking the egg is symbolic of the Resurrection.

Slavic people and some Greek families (usually coming from Northern Greece) 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.

All of these traditions and customs are good -- as long as they do not replace in our heart the memory of Christ Himself who died for us and has risen for our salvation.

From the Fathers

St. Cyril of Alexandria On the Resurrection

"But He who descended into the regions beneath the earth came up again; and Jesus, who was buried, truly rose again the third day. And if the Jews ever worry thee, meet them at once by asking thus: Did Jonah come forth from the whale on the third day, and hath not Christ then risen from the earth on the third day? Is a dead man raised to life on touching the bones of Elisha, and is it not much easier for the Maker of mankind to be raised by the power of the Father? Well then, He truly rose, and after He had risen was seen again of the disciples; and twelve disciples were witnesses of His Resurrection, who bare witness not in pleasing words, but contended even unto torture and death for the truth of the Resurrection. What then, shall every word be established at the mouth of two of three witnesses, according to the Scripture, and, though twelve bear witness to the Resurrection of Christ, art thou still incredulous in regard to His Resurrection?"

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(Lecture 4 - On the ten points of doctrine §12: Of the resurrection)

Matushka's Corner

The Theotokos on Holy and Great Friday

Translated by Mat. Ioanna Callinicos Rhodes

Edited by Fr. 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 sings 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.”

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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.”

Charities

2010 Charities Committee forming

Charities for 2010 have been focusing on dinners for Homeless Shelters. Thanks to all of you who participated! In April we are going to have a Charities Meeting to determine where we want to focus our giving this year. Brooks Szolyga has agreed to act a Charities Committee Coordinator. The date for this meeting will be announced in Church and the weekly news bulletin. Please consider giving your time to this important ministry of the Church.

Христос
Воскресе!

Christ is Risen!