

## **Rites and Readings of the Holy Week**

### **Objectives**

To understand the rites of the church and the sequence of reading during the Holy Week so that we can benefit from it spiritually and follow along with the church without being bored

### **References**

- ❖ (El La-ale-e El Nafeesa) in explaining the Rites and Dogmas of the Church (Part 2)
- ❖ Readings of the Passion Week
- ❖ Service of the youth 1<sup>st</sup> year high school

### **Scriptural Verse**

“Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (Hebrews 13:12-13)

### **Lesson Outline**

#### **The Holy Week**

- ❖ It is a unique week, full of spiritual blessings. We live with the Lord every hour of His sufferings. Christians live in asceticism and used to take the whole week off of work to attend all the prayers of the church.
- ❖ It starts from the Eve of Monday (Sunday Evening) till Saturday and used to be celebrated separately till the days of Pope Demetrius El Karram, the 12<sup>th</sup> Pope, who advised to celebrate it right after Palm Sunday of the Great Lent to be ready spiritually for this great event.
- ❖ We celebrate it to remember the goodness of the Lord and His sufferings on our behalf to abolish our sins so that we can sustain any sufferings or persecutions longing to be also glorified with Him (Romans 8: 17).
- ❖ It is also called the Passion Week for the sufferings of the Lord and the Passover Week referring to the Lord who passed over and saved the 1<sup>st</sup> born of the Israelites who had their home marked with blood (Exodus 12:12- 13).

#### **The General Funeral**

After the liturgy of Palm Sunday, a general funeral prayer is done on water and is sprinkled on the attendants as there will be no funeral services during this week while the church is busy with the sufferings of the Lord. In case of a departure, the priest does not raise incense or pray the Litany for the Departed; he prays the prayers of Pascha of the last hour and the Bible is read.

#### **Rites of the Holy Week**

- ❖ Black decoration to recognize our sins and to share in the Lord’s suffering.
- ❖ Prayers are done in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chorus because the Lord Jesus suffered with the sinners outside the gates of Jerusalem as the sacrifice of sin that was burnt outside the camp (Exodus 4:21)

- ❖ Two lecterns with black cover are put in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chorus: one facing the East for Coptic prayer, the other facing the attendants for English or Arabic explanation.
- ❖ We pray in front of the picture of the Lord Jesus crowned with thorns. This picture is replaced by the decorated Crucifix Icon on a special stand on Good Friday.
- ❖ No prayers with Psalms (Agpeya) because the psalms prophesied about everything. However, the church selects only the psalms related to the sufferings and crucifix
- ❖ The 12 psalms of every hour are replaced by the praise “Thine is the power....” which is repeated 12 times. It is the angels’ praise in front of the throne (Revelation 4:11 ; 5:13)
- ❖ No kisses starting from the Eve of Wednesday till Saturday night. We do not kiss the cross, the pictures or the priest’s hand to refrain from the kiss of Judas. There is also a reverse (wrong direction) procession early on Thursday to condemn Judas the betrayer.
- ❖ No Liturgies on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday as the Lord Jesus did not establish the Sacrament of Eucharist and did not offer Himself yet and also because the Passover lamb should be kept from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> of the month of Nissan to be offered (Exodus 12) and our Lord entered Jerusalem Sunday in the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nissan (that year) to offer Himself (His Body and Blood) on Thursday the 14<sup>th</sup> of the month.
- ❖ We celebrate the Liturgy on Thursday to remember this great event when God offered us His Blood and Body as a New Covenant for an Eternal Glory (Matthew 26: 27- 28). On this day also we celebrate the Liturgy of water “Lakkan” and washing of the feet.
- ❖ The fraction on Thursday is that of Abraham offering Isaac symbolizing the crucifixion.
- ❖ No reconciliation prayer on the liturgies of the Great Thursday and Saturday as the reconciliation is done by the death and resurrection of the Lord.
- ❖ No commemoration of saints during this week as before the cross the righteous were still in Hades and there is no communion between the church and those in Hades. There is commemoration of the Saints and remembrance of the departed on Saturday because the Lord Jesus brought them to the Paradise so we pray for them and they pray for us.
- ❖ We abstain from food on Saturday of light because the Lord Jesus is still in the tomb. So this Saturday is the only one in the year to be fasted with abstaining from food (unless we have taken communion).

### **Readings of the Holy Week**

- ❖ The day starts from sunset of the previous day and is divided into 5 evening and 5 day hours: the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. Only on Good Friday, there is the 12<sup>th</sup> hour and it is prayed inside the first chorus because the Lord opened the paradise through His death.
- ❖ The Book of Matthew is read on Tuesday, Mark on Wednesday, Luke on Thursday and John on Saturday; Lamentations of Jeremiah on the 12<sup>th</sup> hour on Friday, all of the psalms after Friday’s prayers and the Revelation on Apocalypse’s Eve.

### **Order of the “Pascha” hour readings**

- ❖ The Prophecies

The church selects the conform prophecy to read it before the Bible to show that the Old prepared for the New Testament and the prophecies have been fulfilled in the person of our Lord.

❖ The Paschal Praise “Thine is the power...” (Starts and ends with the Lord’s Prayer)

It is repeated before each hour to assure that even in His weakness and humiliation we see the Glorious One. The phrase “My good Savior” is added at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of Tuesday as its gospel states that the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified (Matthew 26:2) while the phrase “The Lord is my strength...and has become my salvation” is added for Good Friday.

❖ The Psalms

The church selects from the psalms all the verses that recall the suffering of the Lord and puts it in order to match each hour’s events. It is chanted with a long sad tune specifically for this week. Its reply is chanted with the same tune “Ke E Perto” (To be worthy .....Let us attend). This sad tune last till the 1<sup>st</sup> hour of the Apocalypse night, to be said ½ sad and ½ annual tune.

❖ The Gospel

It is prayed in Coptic then explained in English or (any spoken language). The Gospel goes very well matching the psalm and the prophecy of the hour.

In Good Friday (starting with the Eve of Friday), the four Gospels are read every hour according to the four evangelists.

❖ The Commentary (Exposition)

It is an explanation with a comment on the Gospel of each hour. Its introduction varies day from night but the ending is the same.

❖ The Litany

The church ceases this very holy special occasion of the year to ask mercies for everyone. During the day it is accompanied with worship “Metanias” because the attendants are fasting. There is also a beginning with “Metanias” for the day litany.

On Good Friday, beside the “Metanias” of every hour, there are also 400 “Metanias” near the end of the service seeking the mercies of God for the whole world (It is done in the 4 directions)

❖ Concluding Prayer

After the Litany, the priest raises the cross and starts to say Lord have mercy upon us. The reply is Lord have mercy (12 times: 6 in each side) and the congregation start the hymn “O King of Peace” then conclude with Amen Alleluia ... bruise Satan under our feet. The Priest says the blessing and dismisses the attendants.

## Conclusion

“Not with the blood of bulls and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption“ (Hebrews 9: 12)

## Activities / Discussion Points

1. Give an idea about the events of each day of the Passion Week

Monday      Eve: the Lord Jesus prophesized about His death and His Resurrection  
Day: He cursed the fig tree that symbolized hypocrisy

Tuesday      Eve: He refused to flee and taught about the narrow gate

Day: He said many parables, prophesied about the destruction of the temple, said that He will be delivered after 2 days and told about the signs of His coming

- Wednesday    Eve: Anointed with fragrant oil and smell of betrayal from Judas  
Day: He went to Bethany to rest (as the lamb) and Judas agreed about His price
- Thursday      Eve: The Lord Jesus has power to lay His life down and to take it again. He kept the place hidden to prevent Judas' act before He completes the New Testament  
Day: He washed their feet then offered His Body and Blood for a New Testament
- Friday          Eve: He Gave Judas the piece of bread; told Peter about the denial; Went to the Olive Mount; the soldiers fell on their back; healed the ear of a soldier  
Day: Peter denied; Judas killed himself; Simon of Cyrene helped carrying the cross; Crucified with two thieves; St. Mary given to St John; darkness for 3 hours; the veil was torn, the earth quaked... the centurion believed; the Burial.
- Saturday        He went to Hades through the cross and freed the captured (Ephesians 4: 8-9) and (1 Peter 3: 18- 19)

2. Why did the people who said Hosanna for the son of David cry out later and say "let Him be crucified...His blood be on us and on our children"?