



# ***The time of love***



**Daily meditations  
on the readings and events  
of the Holy Pascha Week**

**Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty**

*The*  
**Time of Love**

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Pascha Week

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Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty

St. George Coptic Orthodox Church,  
Sporting, Alexandria  
Queen St. Mary & Prince Tadros Coptic Orthodox Church,  
South Brunswick, NJ

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*  
*One God Amen.*

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## The Wondrous Lamb of God

For the believer, the end of the Great Lent or the Forty-Day Fast, or the Paschal Fast until the Glorious Feast of Resurrection, feels like a Passover journey to heaven. It feels like a wonderful opportunity to get to know the person of the Savior, the heavenly Groom. A preparation season for the believer to be molded by the Spirit of God, so that he becomes a truthful image of the Messiah, the eternal Groom.

It has been my practice every year to record my feelings during this unique and wonderful season. I have compiled what was saved from these reflections, and it is my wish to find and collect some of the missing unsaved reflections I had shared w some of my beloved in years past.

I did not classify the reflections per topic, I published them as they are, therefore, let's consider the following:

1. There may be some repetition in the ideas, though I feel that every year is characterized by an understanding that dominates my view of the celebration of Pascha.
2. In some years I was preoccupied with looking at the line of thoughts of some of the fathers of the early church, such as St. Jacob of Sarug or St. Ephraim the Syrian, etc.
3. I tried to summarize some articles and reflections to make them accessible to everyone during the Passover and Pascha days.
4. I feel that it is appropriate for me, as well as for my brethren, that the life of the entire church, as well as the life of every believer, should be days of Resurrection or passing over to heaven,, through our experience of the unceasing power of the resurrection, so we may sing together "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."  
(Philippians 3:10)

## **Last Friday of Lent**

### **On the Strings of the Harp!**

On the morning of the last day of the fast, when our souls are made ready to participate in the Holy Pascha Week (Passover), I was expecting the Matins Psalm to talk about the cross or the endurance of pain, however, what caught my attention was the announcement of: “Sing with the harp”. Here I wondered what he meant by the harp while we were ending the fast and at the gates of Holy Week.

As I considered the words of the psalmist, I assuredly realized that it links our fast to Holy Week. I felt that we fasted these weeks, not to be hard on the body, nor to deprive it of its energy and vitality, but rather so that all its organs and capabilities would spring forth like strings of a harp on which the Holy Spirit of God can play responding to the symphony of love sung by the heavenly Bridegroom on the cross, as if the purpose of fasting is to honor the body in the Lord, for it to submit with the soul to the Spirit of God, so man is completely absorbed in the eternal love story that was manifested in its finest chapters on Mount Golgotha.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the Church, after praising with this psalm, practices “the sacrament of the anointing of the sick” (the Unction), so people are anointed with oil for the sake of healing the body, and they participate with the priests in the sacrament of the Eucharist to abide themselves in Christ. This is how the church cares, during its ritual on the last Friday of Lent, for the health of the body, soul, and spirit together, its likened to a musician who is keen on the safety of his precious harp, and the tuning of its disparate strings.

### **Preparing the body with the soul for the Paschal life**

The Incarnate Word of God whom without blemish went to the cross, a sacrifice of love made for the sake of the whole world, presenting His life as a joyful feast, in which the Father finds His good will, as he inhales the aroma of the complete obedience of the Son, who was obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Philippians :8), and even sees us, we who gave Him our backs, and did not receive Him (Jeremiah 2:27) redeemed to him in a life of obedience and righteousness. He rejoices in us as His children. Believers also find their joy, as they reconcile with God, where he is no longer seen as the Just Judge, but rather the Heavenly Father who receives every soul to his open bosom, no matter the weakness of that soul!

This banquet would not have been fulfilled if it wasn't for Christ alone, the righteous one, who did not suffer because of a sin He committed or evil within Himself, for He is the only-begotten Son who obeys the Father completely, even though His will is one with the Father, and He is the Creator, the Lover of mankind, the one who stretches His hands to unite the



believers from the Old and New Testaments to the bosom of the Father as children of obedience justified by His blood!

Taken by this amazing divine love, we yearn to enter with Him into the “Paschal life”, the life of practical, sacrificial love, to say with the Apostle: “For your sake we are killed all day long” (Romans 8:36). By this we partake in the table of the cross, or as it is said, we repay love with love, presenting from us a table that pleases the heart of God. However, we cannot set this table nor meet God in the circle of practical love unless our whole being is sanctified to carry out the obedience, righteousness, and love of Christ. Perhaps it is for this reason that the Church anoints all the believers with the oil of the anointing of the sick at the end of the fast, so that all together, in the soul as well as in the body, may enjoy the blessings of Passion Week, and prepare our bodies and souls for sharing in His banquet and, in return, preparing a banquet of love for Him.

Through this Unction, we realize that if the Holy and Righteous One suffered for our sake, we too, when we carry His righteousness within us, prepare our bodies along with our souls to accept suffering with Him and for His sake. We exert all our energies for His sake, we are crucified with Him, and we are buried with Him, so that in His resurrection we may rise bearing thirty, sixty and one hundred fruits.

The practice of anointing the sick at the end of Great Lent and the beginning of Holy Week reveals to us the importance of the body’s role in enjoying God’s love. The fiery Holy Spirit, who prepares the heart an inner kingdom for God, also works in the body, so man can participate in all his being to hold the banquet!

Perhaps Holy Week is not an invitation to enjoy the contemplative life in the cross outside the circle of the body. Rather, it is an invitation to sit in the shadow of the cross to enjoy its sweet fruits, where the soul is nourished, and the body is sanctified, so man may wholly worship and serve in the spirit of love and sacrifice.

Just as our Christ presented the banquet of the cross through His body, so it is appropriate for us to offer love. We desire to die for our brethren to live, to suffer while they are comforted, to become poor while they are enriched, to be enslaved while they are set free, to be like people without reason while they are considered wise (1 Corinthians 4:10), deprived of Christ for the sake of our brethren in humanity and our relatives according to the flesh (Romans 9:3).

By this spirit, we partake in the banquet of the cross, presenting our inward and outward lives, as a banquet of love, living sacrifices devoted to our little brethren in Jesus Christ. In this, we know how to participate in the ritual of Passion Week for the rest of our lives.

**Receive, O Lord, my body with all its senses, and my soul with all its energies,  
And my mind, my heart, my emotions and all my potentials, to work with,  
To sing to You a symphony of love mirroring Your inexpressible love.**

## Lazarus Saturday

### A Tomb or a Church?

Passion Week begins with Lazarus Saturday, when in the morning we see Christ sharing Mary and Martha their tears (John 11:35), not to share in the people's mourning, but to take them with the mourners to the grave and raise Lazarus from the dead.

As Christ turned the house of sorrow into a place of joy by raising Lazarus, Mary and Martha held a banquet of thanksgiving to God on that same day. During this banquet, they each expressed in their own way, their love for the Savior. Those three showed us different ways to prepare a banquet for Him who grants us His resurrected life:

- a. What did Lazarus give to Christ? He offered his new life as a true testimony before all, to the One who is able to raise from the dead, as the Scripture says: "Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead." (John 12:9). They came to the banquet to witness how Christ turned the tomb into a church! The tomb in which Lazarus was buried and the stench of his body became a church proclaiming the wondrous work of the Lord Christ!

Our Christ accepts our invitation to the banquet that we prepare for Him, as He transforms our hearts from a tomb that bears corruption to a church that proclaims the joyful kingdom of God!

There is no better feast of thanksgiving that we can offer to our Lord Jesus than our inner spiritual life, which is able, by His grace, to attract many, not to ourselves, but to Christ whom people see working within us and granting us the new, resurrected life!

- b. What did Martha offer at the thanksgiving banquet? "And Martha served" (John 12:2). If God raised your Lazarus, that is your soul, from corruption, then thank Him by serving Him in the least of His brethren. Every material, psychological, or spiritual support that is given to a wounded soul in need is offered to serve the body of Christ. We hear him say: "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." (Matthew 25:39).
- c. Finally, "Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil." (John 12:3). This flask is nothing but the body that participates with the soul, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, in pouring out the fragrant oil in this world at the Savior's feet, so that the house may be filled with it!

Every spiritual worship, no matter how hidden it may be, is a very expensive ointment that God Himself smells pleasingly. The worship of a pure heart is able to spiritually ascend to the throne of God!

### **Thanksgiving Banquet**

Do you want to benefit spiritually from Holy Week? You will not be able to, unless you offer the Lord a banquet of thanksgiving, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in you, in which “your Lazarus” testifies before the crowd that he was dead and came back to life (Luke 15:24); “Martha” who is within you, testifies to the service of His poor brethren; And “Mary” who is within you bears witness to the spiritual worship that the Father smells as a sweet and precious fragrance that fills our eternal home, the heavenly Jerusalem!

Christ accepted the banquet of thanksgiving with its three aspects of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. As for the wicked, they conspire and plot to kill the Lord Christ as well as Lazarus! Do not expect praise from the world for your banquet, but resistance from the wicked to the end.

#### **Let my beloved come to his garden (Songs 4:6)**

#### **And accept the sacrifice of thanksgiving from my weakness!**

- ✠ Whenever I read about You entering the house of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, my heart burns with longing to invite You to enter Your garden which is planted by Your own hands.  
Indeed, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof (Matthew 8:8)  
Nor should you enter my ship, for I am a sinful man (Luke 5:8)!  
Anoint me with the oil of your grace, to heal me from my sins.  
You grant me Your righteousness, and I offer myself, my senses, my mind and my body as a sacrifice of thanksgiving!
- ✠ Because of Your love, You went to the tomb of Lazarus (John 11), and called out his name: "Lazarus, come forth!"  
Call me by my name, and establish a heaven in my heart instead of it being a grave.  
My resurrected life is the work of Your resurrection.  
It is the greatest sacrifice of thanksgiving offered to you.  
My depths thank You, as I cannot ask You for anything!  
Your presence in me raises my dead soul!  
My depths thank You, because You gave me the new and ever-renewing life.
- ✠ With Mary, the sister of Lazarus, my mind rises in meditation  
In your care, love and concern for me, what shall I repay You, O my Savior, for this salvation of Yours?

You gave me Your sweet scent for free, so allow me to offer You what you have given me.

Let Your sweet scent smell in my soul as in my heart and in my body!

What sacrifice of thanksgiving is greater than Your fragrance, O Holy One?

✠ And with Martha, I serve you in everyone I meet.

I yearn, pray, and work for all humankind to enjoy You.

Accept my love for the salvation of my brethren as a sacrifice of thanksgiving to You, O lover of mankind!

## **The Voice of My Beloved Calls Me on Palm Sunday**

### **Here I am, coming to you:**

- ✠ My child, why are you surprised? It was my plan all along. I planned to be late in my visit to Mary and Martha- Lazarus' two sisters.
- ✠ Purposefully, I didn't enter their house or join the procession of the dead. I was late, as everyone thought. But by my grace, I entered their hearts. I equipped them to join my divine procession.
- ✠ Today, I am coming to you – My Jerusalem. Your hearts are My Jerusalem. Your hearts are precious to Me. I have come to carry the sins of the world.

### **I am opening your eyes to see My procession!**

- ✠ My child, the evangelists documented my triumphant entry to Jerusalem. Surely, in this Pascha Week, follow the narrow path.
- ✠ Remember indeed, for you and for your brethren, I the Lamb of God and the High Priest entered. He came to offer Himself as a true sacrifice for the whole world. He has come with great joy to carry you to His divine bosom.

### **Come with Me to the procession of those who have fallen asleep!**

- ✠ I desire to carry your heart to see the procession. A procession for those who have fallen asleep. For nothing compares to the joy of those who have fallen asleep. Or the joy of My procession into Jerusalem. Yes, nothing compares to the praises of the children of Bethlehem and Jerusalem!
- ✠ Oh, how I wish to be able to take you back to the men, women, and children of the Old Testament. So then, you could share their praises and their great thoughts.

### **Abraham – in the procession of those who have fallen asleep:**

- ✠ Look at Abraham. The father of all believers. How he praised with joy saying: I confess to you brothers and sisters that I was greatly surprised. How did I wake up early in the morning to go with joy to slaughter my only son? (Genesis 22:3). It didn't even cross my mind to delay. For I was prepared to offer my only son to my God. It was as if I was going to heaven as I never doubted returning with my son Isaac alive. I truly believed in the One who can raise my son from the dead!

- ✠ Now I see our Christ joyfully going to the slaughter. What Abraham's son Isaac did, was a symbol of the work of God- Father and the Word incarnate! Here is Jesus entering Jerusalem to carry our sins.
- ✠ Abraham's son: Isaac, is blessed to be a symbol of this unique sacrifice! I embrace you My Jesus and embrace Abraham's son: Isaac, in You!

**Isaac – in the procession of those who have fallen asleep:**

- ✠ Come my child and look at Isaac, Abraham's son. His eyes were so dim that he couldn't see. He couldn't tell Esau and Jacob apart (Genesis 27: 18-27). Now as Isaac looked at My procession entering Jerusalem, his eyes are opened. With eyes opened, he then could see Me clearly.

Isaac sang saying: These are the tears of joy!

Don't you wonder why Isaac didn't resist his father, Abraham? Or why he allowed his father to tie him- lying down on the wood- for the burnt offering?

- ✠ Look at Abraham's hands stretched out with the knife to slay his son. Isaac did not resist or criticize his father. He did not even consider him being a cruel father. Rather, Isaac saw his father offering him - his only son - for the life of the whole world.
- ✠ We ought to join Isaac in singing: My soul praises you O Lamb of God! What can I offer you for all your abundant mercies?

**Moses – the first leader of the people of God:**

- ✠ Come my child and meet the first leader I appointed for my people. He was occupied with the Passover lamb. By its blood, the angel of death, passed over the homes of the people of God. Not one of them were destroyed. (Exodus 12).
- ✠ There is Moses looking at my procession. He sees me as the True Lamb that carries the sins of the world. It's not the blood of animals that were slaughtered without their will. I offered My blood for all the world in all the ages. The work of My blood extends from Adam and Eve to the end of all ages. I sanctify the whole church. There are no limits to its work. No place or time!
- ✠ My child, there is no need to go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. I became your Passover when I died for you. I sanctify you with my blood. Surely, wherever you are, I transferred your whole life into a joyful Passover.

I pass over with you. And not from Egypt to the wilderness; but from the slavery of Satan. I pass over with you to the freedom and glory prepared for the children of God.

I pass over with you in pledge of a heavenly life. I took you from the darkness of the grave to the brightness of heaven!

There is Moses, my beloved blessing you. What he didn't see, you are seeing. What he didn't hear, you are hearing. What he practiced in a symbolized form, you are enjoying. I entered with a heavenly procession, to become a new heaven!

- ✠ Blessed are you my child, you are enjoying what kings and many prophets wished to see! Therefore, allow me, my child, to enter your heart. There in your heart- is My Jerusalem and temple. And I have sanctified it with my blood!

### **The prophets celebrate Me!**

- ✠ My child, the prophets are gathered together. Amazingly, they realized the truth of their prophecies.
- ✠ Jeremiah the prophet declared: "I was accused of treason when I spoke about the heaven open for the gentiles.
- ✠ Micah the prophet stated: "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say: Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord," (Micah 4: 1-2).
- ✠ My child, what you see today, is what all the prophets wished to see! My entrance into Jerusalem was the beginning of the sacrifice for mankind. A sacrifice transferred into the prophets' gathering into a heavenly feast.
- ✠ The children of Bethlehem join the procession in praise. Look My child at the children of Bethlehem! The children of Bethlehem and Jerusalem praise Me. All are celebrating My entrance into Jerusalem. They chant: "Herod killed us before we even learned to talk. Herod wanted to silence our voices, but our mouths were opened with heavenly praise to the Son of David!"
- ✠ Truly, the tongues of the children of Jerusalem were opened on the day Christ entered Jerusalem. As for us, we praise in a heavenly language with great joy and exultation!

**My child, join the hosts of those who are welcoming Me:**

✠ My child, I long to enter your house. I long to carry you to My house. I want to abide in you and you in Me!

Come now and join the hosts of the fathers, the prophets, and all the believers of the Old Testament. I can carry you with them as my sheep to paradise!

Rejoice my child. Do not let sorrow enter your heart.

I live inside you and I can turn your life into a non ending feast!

I am your Passover. Sacrificed on your behalf, I pass over with you to My heaven.

You can enjoy Me. I am the eternal life!



## Holy Monday

### **You planted me a Fruitful Paradise:**

On **Palm Sunday, Christ** entered Jerusalem as a king. His royal palace was not like Solomon's stone temple. Instead, it was a kingdom for the souls of believers. A kingdom built by living stones.

As He said to his disciples: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will erect it"... Christ established His kingdom in us. Moreover, He turned our hearts to His royal palace through the power of His glorious Resurrection.

On **Holy Monday, the readings focus** on the fig tree cursed by Christ- and later dried up. The readings review samples of the words of the prophets. Words about the destruction of the fields of Israel. In addition, the words of Christ are presented to us. For instance: "Truly, truly, I say to you, if a grain of wheat does not fall into the ground and die, it remains alone; if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24). This statement confirms that our Christ, the giver of blessing, cursed the fruitless fig tree. He cursed it to plant in us the tree of the cross of His love. This is the tree of life. It shelters all creation under its shade and satisfies through all its fruit.

Christ had to uproot the fruitless trees of our field, to plant in us Himself a "grain of wheat". This established a new field. Albeit a new paradise instead of the lost paradise!

### **Let my beloved enter his paradise!**

- ✠ You desired to eat from the fig tree, but You couldn't find anything to eat. With a word You cursed it, and it dried up! There is no fruitful tree in me that will make Your heart happy.
- ✠ Say a word and uproot from me all that is sterile and fruitless! Instead of the fruitless fig tree, plant Your cross tree. I ask You to bear in me the fruit of your Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, goodness, self-control, longsuffering, gentleness, faithfulness, and forbearance.
- ✠ May Your paradise be planted in my heart! Eat and drink, my beloved, of the gifts of your soul to me!
- ✠ Establish in me Your paradise, in which a river flows.
- ✠ I rejoice in the sweet river of your Holy Spirit! On both sides of the trees that are planted on the streams, fruit comes at the time. The fruit leaves do not scatter, symbolism how He heals the nations.
- ✠ May all humanity come with our Savior and have Him enter their heart.

- ‡ You have given gifts to me and my brethren. For goodness's sake, God give me all that is satisfying, sweet and lovely.

**A land overflowing with honey and milk:**

- ‡ You brought me with Your people from the wilderness into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 8). It was a good land. A land of wheat, barley, vineyard, figs and pomegranates, land of olives and honey. I lacked nothing in it (Deuteronomy 8:9). You offered me honey and milk streams that come together. In my maturity, I enjoy Your honey. In my childhood, I enjoyed Your milk. As for me, I have presented You as a sterile fig tree!

You have not lacked anything. But I do not give You what you have given me. So, curse the fig tree that's in me! Let there be wheat and barley in me. Surely then, man and animal may eat together!

Plant in me vines, figs, and pomegranates. So that everyone drinks from the juice of the vine. May everyone eat from Your fruits.

Yes, just as You entered Jerusalem, in the Promised Land; enter in my heart: the inner Jerusalem.

Make my depths the land of Your promises. As You entered with your people from the wilderness, enter to my depths to make me lack nothing.

**Woe to me for I have lost my paradise!**

- ‡ For my sake, the Garden of Eden was established for me. I should have enjoyed it with my parents Adam and Eve! Alas, stupidly, I surrendered my paradise to the enemy. So, I lost it. Behold, all the prophets inherited my lost paradise.
- ‡ Who will give me back my paradise? To come like a grain of wheat and throw Yourself into my land.
- ‡ To die, Holy One, and raise up a new, fruitful paradise. Yes! Who will restore to me the inner fruit, except you, O life-giving seed?! Only You, threw themselves into the grave. You were buried like the dead, and You restored to me to the fruitful paradise again!

**Christ replied: I will instill in you my paradise, my child!**

- ‡ Why are you troubled, My child? I cursed the fig tree because it is lush and fruitless! I cursed her because she was on the road (Matthew 21:19). I uproot it to plant My cross in you.

I will plant the tree of life within you. Also, I will raise you to my heavenly paradise.

There are many trees on both sides of the river (Ezekiel 47:7). Bearing the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, goodness, self-control, longsuffering, gentleness, faithfulness, and forbearance (Galatians 5:22).

Yesterday, I established within you my royal city. I established in you a holy temple, My royal palace.

Today I instill in you, My paradise. There is no tree without fruit in it!

- ✠ Now you can invite me to enter the paradise (Joshua 4:16). And I will pick your bitterness with your kindness multiplied.

I will eat your Honeycomb with your honey, and I will drink your wine with your bank (Joshua 5:1). There I call My heavenly companions. And I say to them:

“Come, eat and drink, rejoice and rejoice”.

For your sake I set up the Garden of Eden. When I saw that it was good, I now can you up with a unique paradise.

- ✠ The unique paradise has the fountain of wisdom: My heavenly word (Sirach 1). Wisdom’s ways are joyful commandments that will lead you to heaven. Thus, I planted it in you, to plant you in My house.
- ✠ I will tell you what you can do with my generosity. My Holy and fiery Spirit has given you a picture. Seek Me, and you may enjoy the fruit of righteousness (Hosea 10). Seek Me, and you will live forever (Acts 5:6).

## Holy Tuesday

### **An Eternal wedding**

On Palm Sunday, we see our Christ, the King of Kings, forming from the soul a queen and throne simultaneously. The soul united with the King of Kings. Encapsulated with His kingdom inside it. As He forms from its depth, a palace for the king- a joyful kingdom forever.

Furthermore, during the events of Monday of the Holy Pascha, the Divine vinedresser took away all the things; that the heavenly Father had not planted in the soul. He took away the fruitless fig tree. Replacing it with His cross: the tree of life. Likewise, He took the human soul. Transforming it into befitting the heavenly paradise: a paradise overflowing with goodness and rivers of living water. Our Christ rejoices in this garden. He invites the heavenly companions to eat, drink, and rejoice through the pleasing fruit of the Spirit in the believer's souls (Song of Songs 5:1).

During the events of the Tuesday of the Holy Pascha, our Christ is depicted as a heavenly groom. A groom engaged to the soul which previously was divorced, because of adultery and idolatry. Indeed, the soul, which was fired from the heavenly matrimonial home, is now acquainted by the bridegroom: Christ.

He reveals Himself, not out of pride. Rather, He reveals to pour upon the soul – us- with His characteristics. Characteristics that prepare us as His heavenly bride; orth of entering heavens. A joyful bride with an uninterrupted wedding. Aging cannot affect it. Nor will any boredom overtake.

On this day, Christ met with the infamous Pharisees and Sadducees. Both came to entangle Him in his talk (Mathew 22:15-40). Asserting themselves as 'righteous', they became disqualified for the heavenly matrimonial life. Specifically, the Sadducees who denied Christ's glorious Resurrection.

Christ also on this day, met with His disciples, as well as general multitudes of people. This meeting helped prepare them all for the eternal wedding.

Nevertheless, the Jewish chief priests who plotted to kill Christ on this day; represented the unfaithful wife, (Matthew 26:1-16). Hence, Christ found the comforting place in the town of Bethany. Indeed, Bethany was a town for Christ's short reprieve of affliction and suffering.

### **The time of love (Ezekiel 16:8)!**

✠ Due to the impurity of my soul, I was divorced. With divorce, my soul became desolate in its defilement.

My soul has lost its life and joy. What you have done for me, my Savior, is truly the desire of my heart. For, You came to me as a flying eagle. You came to me as the king of birds. Your Holy Spirit carried me to fly like a dove. You sustain me with your strength. You carry me on your wings. You give me the wings of the Spirit- so I can fly to heaven! You descended to earth. You carried me on your wings as an awesome eagle! You lifted me up to you. O wondrous bridegroom! I was as a defiled divorcee in the mud of sin. Yet, I became like a heavenly bride resembling angels!

- ✠ You assured me: "You are from beneath, but I am from above (John 8:23). Let me stick with You; so I do not fall into deep darkness.

May I with certainty say to You: "I am in you from above, I am no longer from this world".

### **The new Matrimonial Home!**

- ✠ I see you weep for Jerusalem, the murderer of the prophets and the stoning of those sent to her (Matthew 23:37). Instead of receiving Your disciples and apostles, O groom; I killed and stoned them.

I defected Your marital home, making it a den of injustice and aggressiveness.

- ✠ May You destroy what is in me: the old Jerusalem; and raise from me a new Jerusalem. A new marital home.

Gather me like the chicks under the tender mother's wings! For only under Your wings, can I take shade there. I can settle and rest. For with You, I can create a marital home!

You stretched out Your hands on the cross for me.

- ✠ You promised me that not one stone shall be left. Here upon another. Nothing would be thrown away!

You promised me that You would embrace me under your wings. You promised me that the old matrimonial house would be extinguished. So that all memories of betrayal would fade.

You promised me to stay under Your wings. A place where the eternal matrimonial house of mine would be!

### **A unique wedding ceremony!**

✠ You have come down from Your heavens, that You may find my wedding ceremony.

I introduced you to the fruitless fig tree on the road.

You gave me wisdom (Proverbs 9) as my wedding banquet!

You invited me while I was in the alleys and roads.

You brought me to a satisfying and unique wedding banquet!

You stretched out Your hand with love; whilst offering Yourself as a sacrifice of love: O high Priest!

You mixed Your wine to fill me with joy (Proverbs 9:1).

You gave me yourself as oil, and I carry You in my lamp.

✠ I become like wise virgins. Rejoicing in being united with You!

You are the hidden oil deep within me.

You are the heavenly wisdom that fills my heart.

You light my soul's lamp with the light of wisdom, I walk in the light cheering!

### **What a wondrous Bridegroom!**

✠ It is amazing that You chose to love me.

It is amazing that You determined the time of our engagement!

All Your works are amazing! Who is like you, my groom?!

✠ You engaged me in the hardest moments. You were reaching out to me while the leaders were planning to kill You! You declared Yourself in love for me.

The Son of the Heavenly King wants me to unite with Him! (Matthew 22:2)

You are wonderful in Your humility (Matthew 25:35).

What kind of groom appears to his bride as a hungry man requesting a piece of bread? Only You. Despite being powerful to feed the whole creation!

✠ You requested me, a materialistic piece of bread; whilst You are the bread who comes down from heaven. You satisfy the bread of angels!

You appeared as a human seeking water to quench his thirst. O Creator of springs, giver of living water!

You appeared as a stranger, so that Your bride may shelter you. While You fill heaven and earth with your divinity!

✠ You appeared naked so that Your bride may cover You. And You clothe creation with your splendor!

You were as a sick patient asking Your bride to visit you. Even though You are the heavenly doctor. The Divine medicine that heals souls!

You were not ashamed to call yourself a prisoner. So that You could ask Your bride to visit you. Although, You already are the provider of freedom. You untie all chains and break the barricades of the abyss.

You are amazing in your humility, O bridegroom. You consider anyone in need as a brother to you.

You call me with my brethren: “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”.

## Holy Wednesday

### **The Compassionate Redeemer**

The sinful woman looked at all those around her. Yet, she did not find any sympathizing heart. Not one person dared to care about her. Many fell in love with her beauty. Or paid a lot of money to satisfy their selfish carnal desires from her. In contrast, some avoided her like the plague. These people were afraid to touch or look at her; thinking they would be defiled. The irony is that those who judged her, already sinned.

Nevertheless, the sinful woman found her Redeemer. He who visited the house of Simon the Pharisee, forgave the sinful woman for she loved much. Moreover, as the sinful woman sold all she had to buy the alabaster flask of fragrant to anoint Christ's feet with it; Christ saw her. Christ accepted her tears of repentance. Indeed, her tears communicated her agony. Indeed, she had no need to use her tongue to utter a word. Her tears of repentance were sufficient to attain Christ's forgiveness- as she loved much. Leaving, Simon the Pharisee missing out on Christ's forgiveness- for he loved little.

Overall, the essence of the sinful woman- unknown to us- is better than Judas Iscariot. For despite being Christ's disciple, Judas Iscariot abused his entrusting as a treasurer; and allowed his love of money overcome his love for Christ. Unlike the sinful woman, Judas Iscariot was not satisfied with Christ. The money in the box became his master. Hence, as he entered the temple, he offered insincere spiritual worship. As a result, he became prone to commit the most heinous crime of treason. A historical crime that would never be forgotten in this present day and age. Woe is he. For he demanded the price of a slave, in return for his Creator. Woe is he. For he led the procession of the multitude of thieves, in return to betray his Savior with a kiss!

### **Who can take care of me like You?**

✠ You are my redeemer who lives. You chose to love and care for me when I was unlovable!

Your grace draws me out of the house of sin.

Your love takes me out onto the road that leads to only You.

You are the way. The only way. And I would sell all I have, to offer You my pure love every day!

✠ As the sinful woman came out of her delusion, grant me also to get out of my delusion.



As the sinners came out of the deception and flattery of carnal people; grant me also wisdom to not fall into keeping appearances and pleasing people. Help me fix my eyes on You: my Living Redeemer!

✠ Give me O Lord, many fountains of tears. As You gave in the past to the sinful woman, give me fountains of tears so I can see You everywhere. May I speak to You in the language of prayer. The language of prayer is the language of the heart. A language that no one else can hear but You!

✠ My mouth often cried out while my lips uttered! It was then that I became afraid to hear your words: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven".

Teach me how to talk to You.

May You see the tears of my heart.

May You hear the sighs of my inner soul.

### **I am afraid because of my garments!**

✠ Judas put on the garment of discipleship to You. He was appointed as a treasurer. Alas, he allowed his garments and position to be the cause of his destruction. Indeed, he did not care about the salvation of his soul.

✠ I cry out with St. John Saba, saying: "I am afraid of my black attire! I fear the robe of priesthood. God forbid that it could be a sedative! God forbid that Your blessing turns into anger because of my hypocrisy".

I cry out from my depths with St. John Chrysostom, "I wonder if a bishop could be saved? Grant me a life of watchfulness. A life without despair. Fill my life with hope. Fill my life without complacency!"

✠ The sinful woman kissed Your feet. You were her redeemer- paying off her debt. However, Your disciple- Judas Iscariot, betrayed Your love and kindness!

You bowed down and washed the betrayer's feet. Shame that he couldn't give you his heart to cleanse!

Allow me to bow down with the sinful woman. Allow me to wash Your feet with purity.

Let me search for You. Chase after You. I want to You.

Even when inside Simon the Pharisee's house, You filled the heavens and Earth with Your divinity.

✠ May I seek You with her!

I need Your grace to draw me to You.

Grant me not to be preoccupied with my outer garment.

May I not be like the Pharisees who were preoccupied with their Pharisee garments.

✠ As Simon the Pharisee was blinded by pride; may I not be blind to You when you visit my house.

Grant me humility to get to You!

Two were preoccupied with their garments. One, being the men from the Old Testament. Two, being the men of the New Testament. So, I beg You to not allow me to be the third.

The Pharisee was preoccupied with being a Pharisee. Likewise, Judas was preoccupied with his garment of discipleship.

As for the sinful woman, she was preoccupied with what was in her depths. And as a result, only she enjoyed You dwelling inside her.

### **You took a human form, for my sake, O Master of all!**

✠ It is not surprising that Your disciple – Judas Iscariot, valued You as a slave. After all, he bargained with the chiefs to hand You over for thirty pieces of silver! What troubles my soul is that You have taken the form of the least among the servants- for my sake- O Master of all!

Which servant finds His pleasure in bending down to wash the feet of others?! Only you can rejoice in offering themselves for others. You offered to shed His own body and blood for the sake of others!

What would I call You- my Creator and Savior? How would You bow before my feet to wash them?! I stink because of my own sins and my corrupted nature! So, it baffles me how You willingly touched my feet. You, whom the heavenly hosts kneel before you, touched my feet!

✠ How could it be that You offer me Your sacrificed body and blood; when You are the Giver of life?

You- the Master became a servant and a slave. You- the Master found His pleasure in serving the slaves. You served not out of obligation, but out of supreme love.

I the slave, with all the pride of my heart, would like to be the Master. Shame on me.

## **The voice of my Beloved calls me on Covenant Thursday**

**Allow Me, My child, to wash your feet!**

**Let Me prepare an eternal feast for you:**

✠ Behold My child, the feast of the Passover is near. I have come to you. I am the Lord of the feasts. I am here to establish the true feast.

I, Who receives offerings and sacrifices, have come to you. I have come to you as a priest and a lamb!

Prepare a place for Me in the upper room of your heart, so that I may plant My cross in it.

Hold My wedding inside your heart; so that your depths transform into an uninterrupted feast!

I do not have a house in which to lay My head. But I am the creator of heaven and earth; and desire to find rest in your heart.

In your heart, I will invite the Seraphim, the Cherubim, and all the Heavenly Hosts, sharing with Me the delight in you.

**Let Me wash your feet, that's My job!**

✠ I did not ascend to the upper chamber of your heart; so that you would tremble with the Cherubim and Seraphim.

I stretch out My hands to serve you. I am here to wash your feet. I declare to you the honor of My humility. Imitate me, so that you may also stretch out your hand, to wash the feet of your brothers.

I grant you to resemble My humility. For only humility can burn all the deceptions of the arrogant enemy.

✠ I bow My head before my servants. But My servants are unable to see this. Alas, my servants are fallen by the arrogant enemy who has infiltrated their hearts.

My pleasure is in washing the feet of My servants. Not only the feet, but the hearts, thoughts, and depths!

This is My work. I the Only Begotten Son, have become a servant tending you all with love.

Do not prevent your feet from being washed by My precious hands. Do not hesitate. Accept me. With acceptance, you will witness My glory and Divine Being.

- ✠ The heavenly chariots will pause in amazement. Leaving Satan to be burnt down before My humility and love. I love even the most treacherous of sinners. I am always willing to wash the feet. Without Me washing your feet, you cannot walk in My path. And without walking in My path, you will not be allowed to enter My Heavenly Kingdom!

**Let Me ascend to the upper chamber of your heart, to eat the true Passover!**

- ✠ I went up with My disciples to the upper room. I offered them my sacrificed body and My blood: the true Passover!

I was rejoicing in the feast. For as I prepared the Passover procession, my people crossed from the servitude of Satan to the grace of sonship to God.

- ✠ During My rejoicing, I revealed to them the true face of Judas Iscariot. He turned against Me as he fell in love with silver. Instead of ascending, his soul descended into the darkness of betrayal. I revealed his plan without mentioning his name. He recognized himself. Whispering if he was the traitor- as if he had no clue. So, I answered him without anyone noticing. Despite being the Judge, in My patience I covered his multitude of sins!

**Know my secrets!**

- ✠ In a tune of love, John the Beloved leaned on My chest, and asked: “Who would deliver You?” So, I did not hide anything from him.

If you too, maintain the purity of your soul, you will obtain the blessing of leaning on My chest. As a result, you too, will get to know My secrets. My beloved son and disciple Peter was in a state of certainty. Yet, in impulsiveness, he declared that he was ready to die with Me! He was faithful. But he did not realize the truth of his weakness! Thus, I opened his eyes on his own weaknesses!

- ✠ My child, know the truth about yourself as I know it. Surrender your life and your power in My hands.

I will support and help you with My supreme grace.

You need to abide in Me and I in you!

### **Here's My bride's dowry!**

✠ Every bride cherishes her dowry as a sign of her groom's love for her. I offer you neither gold nor silver as a bride, but rather I offer you My body and My blood.

Which bride waits for her groom to die, so that she may live?

Which bride waits for her groom to become a slave, so that she becomes a queen?

Which bride waits for her groom to be eaten by her, so that she may become immortal in Him?

I loved you. So, I betrothed you to Me. As a bride to get you out of the humiliation of slavery, I gave you the glory of sonship.

I took on your human weakness and gave you fellowship of the Divine Nature.

### **Enter the Garden of Gethsemane with Me**

✠ Your disobedience expelled you from the Garden of Eden. Now come to accompany Me to the Garden of Gethsemane. For there, I will open the gates of Paradise for you. Also, I will offer you a heavenly citizenship.

The heavenly citizenship will allow you to come to My throne. Only there can you accompany Me and My disciples.

In the garden of Gethsemane, you will realize the value of your glory which I have prepared for you!

✠ I will enter the garden with you. But to an extent. Then, I will go alone to bow before the Father. There, I will carry the sins of the whole world on my shoulders! No creation can bear the weight of one sin!

I will carry your yoke, and the yoke of all your brothers. Therefore, then you can bear my easy and sweet yoke. May you sleep and rest with my disciples! My disciples could not bear to watch with Me for one hour. No one can bear the burden of sins.

No one can realize the depths of My love for mankind. Sin intoxicated them. In addition, knowledge was taken away from them. But I do not demand from them what they are incapable of. Instead, I allowed them to sleep.

Not the sleep of sin and the complacency of disobedience. Rather, a restful sleep. This is the sleep I will give you.

My beloved, the restful sleep is peaceful. And I have perfectly gifted this to you, in place of your anxiety and frustrations.

### **The heavenly praises shall not prevent Me from caring about you!**

- ✠ The heavenlies were astonished when they saw Me sad in the flesh. Even My sweat became like great drops of blood-falling on the ground. Hence, the heavenlies stood in disbelief waiting for a command from Me. A command so that armies of angels would come down and act on My behalf! However, I never allowed it. I was unstoppable!

An angel, on behalf of all the heavenly hosts, dared and bowed before Me, and worshipped in a heavenly language crying out: "To You is the power and glory and blessing and honor forever, Amen". This angel offered Me this praise on your behalf. It captured the depths of My love for you!

- ✠ The heavenlies witnessed the glory of My power in My sufferings. Even when they offered a new hymn; they turned the fellowship of being crucified with Me, into a joyful feast!

### **The Parade of thieves!**

- ✠ Do not be dismayed My child, when you see Judas leading a gang of thieves. He led them carrying swords and sticks.

Be vigilant to not allow darkness to rush and challenge you to defy the Creator.

- ✠ My disciple – Judas Iscariot, kissed Me as a sign to them to arrest me. Along with his kiss he said to me: “Greetings, Rabbi!” Indeed, he who ate My bread has lifted his heel against Me. I endowed him with making signs and wonders. Yet, he led the parade to deliver Me to death!

- ✠ I did not hide My love for you and all your brothers! My disciple Peter stretched out his hand and drew his sword to defend me! But I only ask for a meek heart that testifies to My love. All heavenly forces are ready to defend Me. The senseless nature is able to move and work for Me. One word will burn them like dry straw. Nonetheless for this hour I have come. Truly, this was my pleasure: to turn the enmity of mankind into friendship.

- ✠ Do not be disturbed by the parade of persecutors. Just associate with Me. Accept the resistance of the world to you for My sake!

You may get into trials and harassments while you are with Me.

You will walk the road to Golgotha alongside Me.

You will be carrying My cross with Me. Nevertheless, don't fret for your sufferings are Mine. I will be carrying them with you!

If you die with Me, trust that you will taste the power of My resurrection every day!



## **Our Wonderful Crucified Lord**

The words of Saint Jacob of Serugh touch our hearts. Especially when he speaks about the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. I hope- through these deep spiritual poems- to pinpoint Saint Jacob's detailed homily about our wonderful, crucified Lord. His homily explains what was mentioned in the book of Isaiah that the Lord's name is "Wonderful" (Isaiah 9:6).

### **1. Wonderful when arrested:**

Saint Jacob of Serugh emphasized that the Jewish leaders yearned for someone to give them a sign. A sign to identify Him from among His disciples. Although, He carried out many signs and wonders; and used to walk a lot on their streets or the temple, it was difficult to recognize Him. In his humility, He did not distinguish Himself from His disciples. Neither in His clothes or in His external features. He was a unique teacher around whom tens of thousands of people gathered to listen.

#### **Such is the wonder of His humility!**

It would not have been possible to arrest Him if He had not given Himself up to them. After all, He asked them, "Who do you seek?". IN response, thy fell to the ground in utter helplessness. Clearly, He did not allow them to fall as a display of His authority and power, but to examine themselves before it was too late.

### **2. Wonderful in His trials:**

Even with a large number revolted against Him, their human capabilities, knowledge, and authority, could not find a true witness. Hence, they created false witnesses to testify for Pilate's judgement. Indeed, these false witnesses testified; and when the chief priests heard their testimonies, they realized that it proved His innocence- rather than condemnation.

For instance, one of these false witnesses said: "I saw him myself on the Sabbath while He made mud with the saliva and put it on the eyes of the man who was born blind. Then, this man's eyes were opened. This proved that He is a breaker for the Sabbath!" Likewise, another false witness said: "I saw Him with my own eyes healing many sick people on the Sabbath". Finally, a third false witness testified that he had seen Him healing a paralyzed man in Bethesda on the Sabbath. Nevertheless, in their delusion, the chief priests felt that these testimonies were true. They were so deluded that Pilate used these testimonies to mock them. Indeed, Pilate could not understand how Christ-the accused person- should be punished for His deeds that are beyond human comprehension. If anything, Pilate asserted that Christ should be treated with honor and respect. Hence, as Pilate believed this, he remarked that he found nothing legible to condemn Christ for!

### **3. Wonderful Defence!**

He was also wonderful in His defence. It was not possible to choose someone who would dare to break into this gathering of chief priests, clerks, Pharisees, and people. Especially since everyone was determined to crucify Him- whatever the cost.

The Master sent a defender over whom no one has authority. St. Jacob of Serugh observes that He sent a dream to Pilate but found him awake. Pilate was completely consumed by the proceedings of the trial and unable to act. Therefore, He sent it to his wife, whom when she had slept, was disturbed all night. So much so, that she projected a message to her husband as a warning- to not do harm.

### **4. Reasons for a wonderful verdict:**

Usually, the reasons for the verdict were presented after the Judge heard the accusations as well as the defense. This process would ensure that the Judge thoroughly studied the case before issuing a verdict. In contrast, Christ's trial, and justifications of the verdict, were recorded. Indeed, they were recorded on the tongues and writings of the prophets- centuries before His trial took place.

### **5. Turning the cross into a platform for evangelism:**

Our crucified Christ turned His cross into a platform for evangelism. He did not preach words of exhortation. Nor did He do signs and wonders. Rather, He declared His love for all humanity. His love drew Demas the right hand thief -who looked witnessed His love for him- drawing him to heaven. Demas realized from His eyes that He was the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He realized how much He loved him; and so he glorified Him saying: "Remember me, O Lord, when You come into Your kingdom".

Christ did not need to preach. Truly, the thief, the centurion and the people around confessed: : "Certainly this was a righteous Man!" (Luke 23:47). This confession about Christ- the teacher for generations- prompted many sinners to repent and return to God.

### **6. The stones shout and praise!**

When He entered Jerusalem- prior to being crucified- children, infants, and people praised Him. The Jewish leaders could not bear it. Hence, they asked Him to silence them. Yet, He answered them saying: "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out" (Luke 19:40).

Surely, it was not possible for the children and people to penetrate the revolting masses to glorify Him. Hence, the stones cried out as promised by the Master Himself.

1. The first stone was Demas, the thief with the stony heart. He knew nothing about life- but violence and theft. Now he offered a hymn to our church. A hymn which we recite when serving the departed- travelers from the land of tears to the paradise of joy.
2. The second stone were the inanimate creation glorified Him. Each in its own language that only its Creator could understand. The sun and the moon glorified Him. Indeed, when they saw their Creator naked on the cross, the sun and moon darkened. This event was like Shem and Japheth; who walked backwards to cover their father: Noah's naked body- after he got drunk with the wine. St. Jacob of Serugh supports this notion by stating: "When he was naked, He blew on the light of the world. That is, the sun by day and the moon by night, and then extinguished them. He is the mighty Crucified!"
3. The third stone were the split rocks. As a result of the rocks being split, all the mountains shook. Moreover, the graves were then opened; allowing some of the prophets coming out to enter Jerusalem. Those prophets announced what they had previously prophesied regarding the incarnate Word of God. That was to say that He is the Lamb of God- carrying the sins of the world.

#### **7. The crucified announces departing the temple:**

By presenting His crucified body as a holy temple, He reconciled heaven with earth. In support, St. Jacob of Serugh notes: "The high priest tore his priestly clothes during the trial of the Master. And then he announced without realizing; on the demise of the Levitical priesthood with the advent of the heavenly high priest: our Lord Jesus. Our Lord Jesus who was at the rank of Melchizedek. But the following question pondered: Who tore the veil of the Temple from top to bottom? The answer to that is as follows: the veil torn, meant that the Holy of Holies was no longer confined to the high priest- who entered it once a year. Noticeably, the Lord of glory has opened the holy of holies to his church. Also, the veil symbolized the head covering worn by the Church of the Old Testament. A head covering that a chaste bride of God, acquired for Him. Now with the veil is torn, this announced her rejection of her groom. Engraving herself in God's 'divorce book'.

#### **8. Locking up the heavenly ones in heaven for a while**

Saint Jacob of Serugh believed that the heavenly beings were allowed to serve the Lord Christ on earth before the glorious Resurrection. Specifically, it was the appearance of an angel in Gethsemane who strengthened Him (Luke 22: 43).

Evidently, the angels could not bear the insult that was directed against Lot by the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Just as they could not bear the insult that was directed against King Hezekiah. Furthering King Hezekiah's protection, an angel descended and killed 185,000

Assyrian soldiers in one night. Thus, the angels could not bear to see their Creator humiliated by the earthy people. From His trial, flogging and crucifixion, the angels were distraught! Hence, the Lord detained the angels in the heavens, until His crucifixion was completed.

### **9. The Crucified, Judge of the world**

The crucifiers wanted to mock him. So much so that they crucified two thieves with him- one on His right and the other on His left. The prophet Isaiah prophesied about this event stating: “And He was numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12).

What was mockery, turned into glory for Demas- the right-handed thief. Demas returned to Him as a symbol of the Holy Church adhering His divine voice saying: “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:” (Matthew 25:34). In contrast, the thief on the left was a symbol of unbelievers. People who could not bear to look at Him.

### **10. A strange marital home:**

A fiancée often asks her fiancé about the town of future residence. However, the crucified Heavenly Bridegroom did not wait for His bride to ask Him. Rather, He set up a dwelling for her in the greatest and safest place. He also allowed a soldier to stab Him in the side with a spear.

St. Jacob of Serugh confirms the following: “The master dug a place in Him, i.e., in the Rock of Ages, with a spear. The bride entered Him and saw His heart blazing with the fire of His wondrous love. There she hid. So that the enemy of goodness could not deceive her- as he previously did- in the Garden of Eden.

### **11. The Heavenly High Priest baptizes while He was crucified.**

St. Jacob of Serugh perceived the symbolism behind the blood and water which flowed when Our Lord was stabbed with a spear. Hence, St Jacob notes that when He was crucified; the blood and water from his side, baptized the thief-Demas who believed in him. With this, He granted Demas adoption to the Father.

### **12. He wrote a letter with His own blood, presenting with His royal scepter:**

As the gates of the Mesopotamian Garden of Eden closed off from Adam and Eve, the condemnation to return to dust, was ostensible. Hence, the thief- Demas, required a divine permit to enter. Enter not the earthly Garden of Eden, but the heavenly Paradise. So, the Master, with his most precious blood, wrote him a letter to let him in; signing it with his royal phallus.

The Jews wanted to mock him when he claimed to be a king. For example, they gave Him a reed and a purple robe. Thus, Saint Jacob of Serugh observes that kings would use the reed to sign. So, if Christ had been stabbed with a spear to indicate His death; then this stab also indicated His dwelling place for his bride. Surely, it was with His blood that all believers retained the birthright to enter Paradise again. What a marvel! For Paradise was opened to the children of mankind.

Nevertheless, Saint Jacob of Serugh addressed that when Demas the thief went to paradise, he saw the cherub- the guardian of paradise. Following this, the cherub ran quickly towards him asking him where he was going. When he answered him that he was going to paradise, the cherub reminded him: Do you not remember what God previously judged Adam and Eve's fate? Little did the cherub know, that the thief already knew. Indeed, Demas was simply following through with where Christ asked him to go- heaven.

**Here is a more detailed dialogue:**

The cherub was astonished, and asked, "Who are you?"

He replied, "I am Demas, the right-hand thief!"

The cherub almost did not believe what he just heard, so he said to him: "Do you not know that no human being can enter Paradise? And how much more if you were a thief? Where are you going? In Paradise there is no one who could be killed. There is nothing that could be stolen. All that is in Paradise are heavenly glories that cannot be stolen. Do you understand me?"

With a smile, Demas answered: "I did not come here to kill anyone. My savior Jesus was killed on the cross. He saved me! And I will not steal from anymore, since all paradise is now mine. The King of kings dwells in my heart. He established His kingdom within me. I do not need to steal anymore! Christ has rejoiced my heart. He filled my soul. He gave me a new nature that no longer knows evil!"

The cherub marveled at his answer, and then asked to see the letter that Demas had in his hands. So, when he saw it, he immediately carried Demas on his wings, joyfully. Then he shouted, summoning all the heavenly powers to rejoice with him.

The cherub asked Demas: "Why didn't Adam tell us that he and his descendants were finally forgiven? Or Noah whose ark God made a symbol for the Church? Or Moses prophet, the receiver of the law, who liberated the people of God in the past from the bondage of Pharaoh. Or anyone of the prophets. Or even Jesus' cousin, St. John the Baptist who prostrated to Him while he was still an infant in his mother's womb?"

Demas replied: "Have you heard of the parable of the laborers? I am one of the laborers of the eleventh hour and Christ promised that the last will be first. For truly, I do not even deserve life on earth. I was in the humiliation of my sins. But He raised me with His grace,

manifesting the power of His cross in me. He even asked me to go ahead of him to preach to you of his coming, along with all the believers in Hades. "

The cherub then inquired: "Did you ask to get ahead of everyone else?"

The thief answered: "I daringly asked Him to remember me when He comes into His kingdom. But He refused to have me wait until He comes into His kingdom, but rather He said to me: 'I do not want to break a law that I have laid down as I am the lawmaker even though I have the right to do so. Afterall, I did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it.'"

The cherub then asked, "What do you think He meant by that?"

Demas replied: "If someone hires a person, he will give him his wages at the end of the day. He will not tell him that he will give him the wages the next day. Thus, he did not want to postpone His remembrance of me until tomorrow. So He assured me: 'Today you will be with me in Paradise.'"

## The Vigil of Bright Saturday

As our church stood hours ago, celebrating the victory of our King and Savior Jesus Christ, we can stand in awe envisioning His majestic entrance through gates of Hades. He has come to free those who died- with the hope of salvation.

Finally, the day long waited for has come. Truly, the old times and new times have gathered. Men, women, kings, Priests and prophets, laymen, young and old, praise the only God and Redeemer. Watching the locks and chains melt away from His mighty presence, we all sing hymns of praise to honor His Holy Name.

1. Seeing David singing his psalm 151 saying I'm the youngest of my father's house and the Shepard of his flock. It was as if he declared to all that the Messiah who saves, is his son in the flesh. Hence, he was feeling so unworthy to be among the prophets and to have such an honor.
2. While David didn't write all the psalms, he is considered the delightful chanter of Israel. Especially since he acknowledged that his psalms are all but a gift from God.
3. Considering Moses, he follows in the path of David. For he led the people of Israel in hymns of joy - with his sister Mariam - (Exodus 15). This song is part of our liturgical hymns; symbolizing the salvation presented by our crucified Lord.
4. Regarding the Chorus of the believers - young and old - we are joyful. For the believers who walked through all the gates of hades, destroyed its gates and were set free. From Jonah who praised God from the depth of the sea, to the three youths praising God in the fiery furnace, to finally Daniel who praised God in the Lion's Den. These are examples of unwavering faith; a faith that led to their unity with God in heaven.
5. Specifically, the church here on earth relates to the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation is sung throughout the night. Whilst singing, the veil of the altar remains open and our eyes are lifted to heaven. As a result, we attain hope to join those who were just freed from hades and entered Paradise. Such hope creates a longing for us to join them one day in the paradise of joy.
6. Continuing the celebration of our church, the mystery of the Divine liturgy and the Holy Communion are celebrated. Particularly, during the early hours of Bright Saturday. Moreover, the Divine Liturgy begins in a mournful tune as an acknowledgment of the triumphant church and the bitterness of trials and tribulations that the church still faces. As the Divine Liturgy progresses to Holy Communion, we sing a joyful tune. The joyful tune resembles our joy for our Lord Jesus Christ. For He has freed humanity from the evil one. This makes us also look forward to being united with Him in the ages to come!

## **The Resurrection of Christ in Your Life**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not an abstract historical event. No. It is a wonderful realistic fact. A fact that affects you and I's lives for the better. In consequence, our being and potential is encompassed on account of personal divine promises. Such eternal credit will not be taken away!

### **Do you know Jesus?**

The masses gathered around Him in thousands and enjoyed his miracles. Yet, you will agree that all could see Him truly. So may we be vigilant to not fall into this predicament. Indeed, we chant with full intent: "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Philippians 3:10).

Did you know Him dwelling within you, is transforming your inner grave into sacred heavens? You know Him breaking the sting of death and overcoming the abyss (1 Corinthians 15: 56). But you should know Him fully to enjoy your cross, and even death on this earth! May you know him, the grantor of victory; and have no fear over the last enemy: death!

### **Do you reign with Christ?**

Enter His grave. It is only there where you will live and reign. You will also have authority over your thoughts, feelings, and emotions. You will live in spirit. And you will never know defeat. Then, it will be said about you with your brethren : "And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years." (Revelation 20:4).

### **Are you blessed and holy?**

If you complain of corruption and defilement, then hasten to His grave today. Embrace Him who confirmed: "I am the resurrection" (John 11:25). Allow the stone of your tomb to be rolled away. Let our bonds be loosened by Him. For then, you will hear His divine voice saying: "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43). You are Lazarus. You must come out from the filth of your grave; to experience the blessed and holy life. Really, may you receive the Holy One in your depths! For blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection." (Revelation 20:6).

### **Is your body sanctified in your eyes?**

The soul often loathes the body because of its weaknesses. But the resurrection of the Messiah, sanctified our bodies. Hence, enjoy the resurrection. For our souls here experience



the first resurrection, and our bodies taste the blessings of the resurrection. Our human lusts no longer have power. Believe it.

Whilst you await with confidence and certainty for the second resurrection, be prepared to share the heavenly crown and eternal glory.

### **My Beloved's voice at his empty tomb!**

✠ My soul groans within me, saying in bitterness crying: Why do I live, while I have become a dirty graveyard? What do I ask for? What can I do when the lusts of the flesh have enslaved me?! What do I hope for when all my mission has collapsed?!

✠ I heard the voice of my beloved at his empty grave: Do not be afraid... I am the resurrection! Come on now. Get to know me. I am alive, I give you life! Turn your grave into a holy luminous heaven! I will make you king with power! You say to this thought: Come, and it comes, and to that thought: Get out, and it leaves!

I met you at your grave, my beloved Savior, so I experienced the first resurrection...My soul tasted the blessed life and got to know the Holy One. I wonder when my body dies to rise crowned with the soul! Your resurrection transformed my life here into sweetness. Your resurrection inflamed my depths with a longing for eternal life!

I knew Your resurrection working in me now. It helps me experience You with new depths daily!

### **Sayings of the Fathers on the Resurrection of Christ:**

Where is death? Seek it in Christ, for it exists no longer; but it did exist and now it is dead.

O Life, O Death of death! Be of good heart; it will die in us, also.

What has taken place in our Head will take place in His members; death will die in us, also.

But when? At the end of the world, at the resurrection of the dead in which we believe and concerning which we do not doubt.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> *Sermons for the Easter Season 233:4*

The day before yesterday scribes were mocking at Him [saying], "save yourself" and today the watchers are kissing His tomb which He has left and gone out. Yesterday the Dead One was lying concealed and silent in the habitation of Sheol but today He is alive and gives life to the dead and raises all to life.

The day before yesterday, lance, gall and vinegar and. crucifixion, but today glory and clamor of the watchers with praise.

The day before yesterday the Only-Begotten placed His soul in the hands of His Father but today He assumed it [*the soul*] for He has authority as He commands all.

Yesterday He had mounted the wood of crucifixion, but today there is strength, resurrection of the dead and power.

The day before yesterday Simon repeatedly renounced (saying) that he does not know Him but today he runs to see His tomb because He was raised up.'

The Friday of the sufferings prepared ambushes for the apostolic group; but on Sunday, a new vision and cheerfulness.

Yesterday the King was seized up in sleep in Sheol, but today He woke up and stood like a man who shook off his wine.

The other day there were sufferings and sorrow for the women disciples but today exultation because they were seeing Him as the Gardener.

On the sorrowful Sabbath that Free Born was among the dead, but on Sunday He was escorted about by the companies of watchers.

Friday scattered the apostolic group in desolation, but today has given joy to, and gathered together the company of the disciples.

Yesterday the apostles were lying in concealment, but today they went out to see the resurrection with wonder.

The other day (they had) to flee, to be scattered, and to hide themselves, but today to run, to be gathered together and to bring the tidings.<sup>2</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

For it is God, my beloved, even the God Who at first established the feast for us, Who grants the celebration of it year by year. He also brought about the slaying of His Son for salvation and gave us this reason for the holy feast; to which every year is a witness, the feast being proclaimed annually at a season corresponding with the present. This also leads us on

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<sup>2</sup> *Homily XIII on the Great Sunday of the Resurrection*

from the cross by means of this world to that which is before us, and God produces even now from it the joy of glorious salvation, bringing us to the same assembly, and in every place uniting all of us in Spirit, appointing us common prayers, and a common grace proceeding from the feast.<sup>3</sup>

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

[The secret of the Church's enlightenment] is the resurrection of the Lord, which offered us a new life that death cannot conquer, darkness cannot seize nor can the grave destroy.

**Saint Clement of Alexandria**

**May our Risen Lord fill you and all humankind, with His heavenly peace.**

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<sup>3</sup> *Paschal Letters: 5*



**For the believer, the end of the Great Lent or the Forty–Day Fast, or the Paschal Fast until the Glorious Feast of Resurrection, feels like a Passover journey to heaven.**

**It feels like a wonderful opportunity to get to know the person of the Savior, the heavenly Groom.**

**A preparation season for the believer to be molded by the Spirit of God, so that he becomes a truthful image of the Messiah, the eternal Groom.**



**Fr.Tadros Y. Malaty**