



KAT'OIKON EKKΛHΣIA
Family as
Church

by Melissa Tsongranis

With this preparation [Lent] we are invited to enter the sanctuary of Holy Week, not as spectators, but as participants in the commemoration and enactment of the divine acts that changed the world.

Rev. George Mastrantonis

Great Lent is known as a time of preparation—a time when we make ourselves ready to experience the glorious Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As we pass the midpoint of our Lenten journey, we begin to look toward our passage into the most blessed time of all, Holy Week. Set apart from Lent itself, Holy Week begins with the evening service on Palm Sunday (which is actually the Matins of Holy Monday).

It certainly is a most-beautiful and inspiring week, but unfortunately there is often one word that many of us would also use to describe Holy Week—exhausting.

A few years back I had the great blessing of spending Holy Week at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. For one week I was transported out of my daily life and into one of prayer and silence. I worshiped every morning and evening with the community there.

I didn't have a television and my cell phone use was limited because I was not getting good reception. I didn't need to cook because I ate my meals in the cafeteria. For one week, I lived very simply and focused on the beauty that is Holy Week. It was incredible!

But do you want to know what it wasn't? It wasn't exhausting! Don't get me wrong, at night I was tired, but it was a "good" tired—the type that leads to restful sleep and to a refreshed morning. That week I realized that my typical exhaustion during Holy Week had nothing to do with church and everything to do with me not focusing on what is truly important—my journey with Christ.

Holy Week calls us to escort our Lord to His Passion and rejoice with Him in His triumphant Resurrection and nothing should be more important than doing just that.

But we can't all transport ourselves away from our daily life to experience a peaceful Pascha, nor should we have to. There are steps we can take to help reduce all the distraction that keep us from focusing on God. So, this year let's try to do things a little different. It is only one week—one very special week. Are you ready? Here are some suggestions to get started:

A week or two before Holy Week have the adults in your family sit down with your church's Holy Week schedule. Decide how your family will be participating in the different services and activities, then write them on your family calendar for all

For the Orthodox Family... Preparing for the Feast



Greek Orthodox Christians attend the mass of the Holy Light at the Church of Resurrection in Jerusalem.

to see. Once this is done, call your family together to plan for the week by looking at all aspects of your daily life and how you can focus it toward God by setting things aside, preparing, and being still.

Set Aside

We who mystically represent the Cherubim sing the thrice holy hymn to the life giving Trinity. Let us set aside all the cares of life that we may receive the King of all.

Cherubic Hymn

Each Divine Liturgy, we hear the beautiful Cherubic Hymn quoted above. But how often do we really strive to "set aside the cares of life"? As you begin to plan for Holy Week, discuss things you can set aside.

Consider your typical household tasks, and your typical weekly running around. Are they really necessary? If you can, postpone them and move them to your to-do list for another time. Consider canceling piano lessons, ballet, baseball and other extra-curricular activities for this week—missing one week will not matter in the grand scheme of life.

There are other things you need to eliminate as well—jealousy, anger, gossip, etc.—there is no time for these things this week. Actually, working to rid yourself of these permanently would be even better, but for now let's start with this week. Through setting aside all nonessential tasks and irreverence, we have some time to fill—fill it by glorifying God!

Prepare

If you would prepare your heart, and stretch out your hands toward Him;

Job 11:13

Now you can't eliminate everything—you will have certain tasks to do. This is where strategic planning comes in. Anything you can do before Holy Week, you should do.

Set a family workday to prepare for Holy Week, perhaps between the Saturday of Lazarus morning service and the evening vespers. Clean the house, wash and iron the clothes, and do all your cooking for the week.

Make a list of things that despite your family's workday will still need attention during the week. Divide up the tasks and allot the proper time to complete them during the week. Remember you need to keep things simple! Make a big pot of beans and rice (yes, you can eat it

several nights in a row), pre-make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and lay out everyone's clothes for the week.

With the time saved you can prepare yourself and your family for church. Learn about the different days of Holy Week and what we commemorate on each day (a good source for information on this is www.goarch.org).

Look at the service ahead of time and review how it will progress. Discuss this with your children so that they can know what to expect and what to listen and look for. Learn a hymn for the upcoming service so that you can sing along.

Again, keep it simple; inspire their hearts to worship, but don't bombard your children with a detailed analysis of each service and its significance in Holy Week.

Be Still

Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!

Psalm 46:10

Be still and listen to God. Turn off the television. Turn off the radio (or turn on church music). If you can, disconnect completely from your cell phone and email. If you can not do this because of necessity, designate certain times of the day when both are off limits (perhaps from the time you get home from work until you leave the next morning).

Create a quiet time when your family refrains from talking unless there is an emergency. For children, make sure they have something to help them focus their attention on God during this quiet time through prayer, reading, writing, or even drawing a picture.

Are You Ready?

If the President of the United States was coming to stay at your house for a week, you would likely turn your schedules upside down for him/her. Doesn't our Lord deserve much more than that courtesy? Take yourself out of the world just for one week—it will still be waiting for you when you come back.

On Holy Tuesday, we commemorate the Parable of the Ten Virgins awaiting their bridegroom. As the parable goes, all of the women took lamps with them to meet the bridegroom but only five brought extra oil with them so that their lamps wouldn't extinguish.

These women took the time to prop-

erly prepare themselves to enter into the Feast. Let us properly prepare ourselves for the Feast of Pascha by making sure we have enough "oil" to make it through. Holy Week is just seven days; set them apart and commit as a family to live your lives radically different for this time.

Give your life completely to God—after all, He gave His life completely for us!

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From the Paschal Homily of St. John Chrysostom

If any man be devout and love God, let him enjoy this fair and radiant triumphal feast. If any man be a wise servant, let him rejoicing enter into the joy of his Lord. If any have labored long in fasting, let him now receive his recompense.

If any have wrought from the first hour, let him today receive his just reward. If any have come at the third hour, let him with thankfulness keep the feast.

If any have arrived at the sixth hour, let him have no misgivings; because he shall in nowise be deprived therefore. If any have delayed until the ninth hour, let him draw near, fearing nothing.

If any have tarried even until the eleventh hour, let him, also, be not alarmed at his tardiness; for the Lord, who is jealous of his honor, will accept the last even as the first; he gives rest unto him who comes at the eleventh hour, even as unto him who has wrought from the first hour.

And he shows mercy upon the last, and cares for the first; and to the one he gives, and upon the other he bestows gifts. And he both accepts the deeds, and welcomes the intention, and honors the acts and praises the offering. Wherefore, enter you all into the joy of your Lord; and receive your reward, both the first, and likewise the second.

You rich and poor together, hold high festival. You sober and you heedless, honor the day. Rejoice today, both you who have fasted and you who have disregarded the fast.

The table is full-laden; feast ye all sumptuously. The calf is fatted; let no one go hungry away... O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory?

Christ is risen, and you are overthrown. Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life reigns. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave.

For Christ, being risen from the dead, is become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. To Him be glory and dominion unto ages of ages. Amen.

FAMILY ACTIVITY CORNER

Diana's Pascha Story Cookies

Here is a fun and educational activity for all to do early on Holy Saturday evening—perhaps right before your family takes a nap to prepare for the Resurrection service. These cookies will help your children learn about Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. After you return from the Resurrection service, you are in for a special surprise when you open the oven. For a recipe and teaching instructions, visit www.phyllisonest.com. You will find the recipe in "Resources" section under the "Lenten and Pascha Resources". Enjoy!