

law. The high priest offers this sacrifice on behalf of both the people and himself. The priest is human and part of our human condition, so must offer sacrifice for his own sins. But Jesus is the sinless one. He alone can offer sacrifice on our behalf without the stain of sin. And when that sacrifice is Jesus himself on the cross, this has the power to save us.

This passage from Hebrews is chosen because Sunday is dedicated to the Holy Cross. The gospel from Mark picks up this theme as well. Here we are admonished to take up our cross and follow the example of Christ. The themes of discipleship on Great Fast weekends continue in this powerful command. We must deny ourselves, just as Jesus does as the high priest in Hebrews. We take up our cross and become the sacrifice, just as Jesus does.

This powerful command is followed by a warning (see the opening quote). If we do not deny ourselves and take up the cross, Christ will deny us in the world to come. Our actions in imitating Christ on earth become our judgement in the next life, for good or for ill.

This mid-point of the fast recognizes the difficulties we face in this challenge. The church knows we have a tough time with these sacrifices. So while it plants this reminder of the cross we also receive a reminder of the resurrection. During Matins the first stanza of each Ode comes from the Paschal Matins Canon. While we are challenged by the cross, we get a taste of the coming Pascha.

“This is that chosen and holy day, Feast of feasts, most solemn day, only king and lord of all Sabbaths, on which we ever praise Christ.”

Sunday Matins Ode 8

The challenge is great, but the reward is in sight. The Feast of feast looms large over the near horizon. If we continue to accept the challenge of Christ we will receive the reward, a life in Christ. The community will come together in faith and love drawing nearer and nearer to Christ as we go.

Steve Puluka

Scripture in the Great Fast

Saturday

Hebrews 10:31-38

Mark 2:14-17

Sunday

Hebrews 4:14-5:6

Mark 8:34-9:1



“ And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?”

Mark 8:34-36

Third Weekend of the Great Fast

This weekend the readings from Hebrews and Mark continue the themes of OT fulfillment and discipleship. Throughout the Great Fast the OT readings during the week are bringing through the revelation of God’s plan. Genesis is bringing us onward to our exile in the land of Egypt.

From Egypt Moses rescues his people by the power of God. This Exodus prefigures the coming death and resurrection of Christ. Christ becomes that

“By following your passions, O my soul, you have become like the unreasoning beasts; who else surpasses you in sins? Beseech Christ, in his goodness, to save you.”

Saturday
Matins
Ode 7

passover lamb during Holy Week leading us out of the exile of sin by his resurrection.

The Church sees in God's actions during the original Exodus the shadow of the actions to come in Christ. We can see the hints of the saving cross in many of the events of the original Exodus from Egypt.

“In days of old, Moses prefigured your precious and holy Cross, O Christ our God, when, with his wooden staff, he opened the Red Sea and let the people of Israel pass through, as they sang the hymn of victory to the Lord.”

Sunday Matins Ode 1

When the fathers visualize Moses standing over the Red Sea holding up his wooden staff, they see a saving leader with both arms outstretched. The wood of the staff reminds us of the wood of the cross. The outstretched arms remind us of Christ's arms being stretched on the cross. The passage of the people through the water reminds us of our own baptism.

Saturday

Saturday's Gospel continues the theme of discipleship with the story of Levi, the tax collector. Here the authorities complain about Jesus' association with sinners. The position of tax collector involved collaboration with the conquering power and cheating the population for your own gain.

A strict interpretation of OT law demands that you refuse to associate with those who publicly sin. But Jesus demonstrates by his association with Levi that the real purpose of the law is salvation. The demand against association is to prevent others from joining in sinful behavior. But God does desire that those in the trap of sin be brought back to the faith.

Association with those in sin to bring healing is good and

different from joining them in their activities. Thus Jesus proclaims that “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”

The Matins Canon (see left panel) reminds us that we are the sick in sin. We need to beseech Christ to save us. Following the example of Levi.

Saturday's reading from Hebrews continues our Christian interpretation of the OT. Using quotations from Isaiah and Habakkuk to remind us that God will come again to vindicate the righteous. We can expect trial and tribulation in this life, but this is only temporary.

Hebrews asks us to remember the times of persecution. The community written to here suffered after their “enlightenment”, an reference to baptism. Our baptismal call to follow Christ means we can expect to be persecuted as he was. Saturday we again remember those who fell asleep in the Lord. They provide an example of which Hebrews is a reminder.

“Courageously you went to your tortures in the arena, O holy martyrs; your flesh endured torments; and from the place in which you repose, you lighten every suffering of our hearts.”

Saturday Matins Ode 8

Sunday

The reading from Hebrews focuses on Jesus as the high priest. In OT revelation there are two messianic figures, the king and the high priest. Jesus is king by the lineage of David. Today Hebrews details how Jesus fulfills the office of high priest as well. Hebrews reminds us that Melchizedek in Genesis holds both the office of King and priest. Jesus does the same for us.

The Jesus as the high priest makes the sin offering on behalf of the people. This offering is prescribed by the OT



“O Christ our God,
You willingly suffered crucifixion, for the resurrection of all humanity. On the Cross, You signed the royal charter of our liberation, with the purple of your blood. Do not forsake us when we are in danger of being separated from You.”

Sunday
Vespers at