

“Whoever would be first among you must be the slave to all.” We will be reminded of this service on Holy Thursday when Christ washes the feet of his disciples.

This human desire for power and authority here and now is precisely the opposite of what life in the trinity proclaims. God is community in the trinity. We reflect that community of love here on earth. There is no lording over others, only service and love. The earth has fallen prey to the power of sin. The power structures of the earth are not the ways of God's community. Only in giving our lives over to service in the community can we approach the life of the trinity and truly prepare for the future.

How disappointed Jesus is that after all this time living and teaching together the apostles still don't understand this basic premise. James & John ask for this earthly power on the very road to Pascha in Jerusalem. This serves as a warning to us, on our road to Pascha.

The Hebrews reading continues directly from yesterdays section. Saturday we are focused on Mary as the ark, today Jesus is the high priest. Hebrews directly connects these two aspects of the temple ritual. In all the Old Testament we see the shadow of the events of our salvation that will come in the New Testament. They foreshadow the mystery of our redemption by Christ's blood. The sacrifices of the high priest in the Old Testament were the means of forgiveness of sin. This prefigures the forgiveness we receive by Christ's death and resurrection.

“For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

Hebrews 9:13-14

The sprinkling of blood on the sinful people is the foreshadowing of the descent of the Holy Spirit on a new people in Christ. In the old covenant the people give up their goods to atone for their sin and receive the sprinkling of blood as a sign of the acceptance. In the new covenant Christ sacrifices himself and the Holy Spirit flows out to make a new nation in service to each other.

Steve Puluka

Scripture in the Great Fast

Saturday

Hebrew 9:1-7

Luke 1:19-49, 56

Sunday

Hebrews 9:11-14

Mark 10:32-45



“ And the angel said to he, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the most high will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.' ”

Hebrews 1:1-4

Fifth Weekend of the Great Fast

This fifth weekend of the Great Fast we continue the themes of Old Testament fulfillment and discipleship in the scripture readings. On Sunday the apostles are taught the true meaning of authority. Saturday focuses on Mary as the prime example of discipleship. The epsitle readings from Hebrews connect both Mary and Jesus to temple worship in the Old Testament. The commemoration for the weekend is St. Mary of Egypt, a prominent example of turning one's life from sin to the Lord.

The Luke passage highlights the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary. The Holy Spirit makes God flesh in her womb. The fathers compare this moment to

“Rejoice,
spacious
tabernacle
of the Word
of God;
rejoice,
most pure
one, for you
have
fashioned
the divine
jewel;
rejoice,
unparalleled
wonder; you
reconcile
with God
those who
proclaim
you blessed,
O Mother of
God.”

Saturday
Matins
Ode 5

our baptism into Christ. With the coming of the Holy Spirit to Mary, Jesus is born from above. In his encounter with Nicodemus Jesus tells us that we will be born from above with the spirit. In our baptism we receive this promise.

“Who was born from the Holy Spirit.’ Precisely thus is Christ born for you, in such a way that he may change your own manner of birth...Formerly death awaited you as the setting sun of your life; he wants you to have a new birth of life.”

Peter Chrysologus Sermon 57

Thus Mary's role in our salvation is intimately linked to the events of our “new” Exodus. The manner of Christ's birth is more than a mere miraculous event, his birth is the example for our own rebirth in Baptism. Therefore, we commemorate Mary on this fifth weekend of the Great Fast.

Saturday

Marian themes are found throughout the services for today, known as Akathist Saturday. The Akathist service (meaning standing in Greek, a sign of respect) to Mary is celebrated this day. The gospel is the story of Mary and Elizabeth and the epistle is Hebrews description of the temple sanctuary. Patristic thought sees the temple sanctuary as a symbol for Mary, they both are an earthly house for God.

The rules of worship foreshadow the coming of Christ. The fathers compare Mary to the Ark of the Covenant (left panel). In the Holy of Holies the ark contains the law tablets. Mary carries Christ in her womb. Mary is the ark and Christ the fulfillment of the law.

Gabriel visits both Zechariah and Mary. One struck dumb the other submits to the will of God. Here Mary becomes our example of discipleship. The two miraculous births are connectd in salvation history and provide examples of how to



respond to God's will. Zechariah does come to believe and his speech restored. God does forgive his lack of faith.

The story ends with the poem of Mary praising God commonly known as the Magnificat. This is a liturgical song of triumph that follows the patter of Exodus Song of the Sea. These two songs play a prominent role in Christian liturgy. They are the basis for the first and last odes in the matins canon. The canon is the center piece of the morning service. Canon ode 1 always contains reference to the Exodus Song of the Sea. Ode 9, the last ode, always references the Magnificat. These two songs open and close every canon. The Great Fast ends with our new Exodus with Christ as our Paschal lamb. This liturgical structure focuses our attention on the connection between the original Exodus from Egypt and the fulfillment of this Exodus in Christ's resurrection. On this Saturday the Church makes this connection.

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in god my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is might has done great things for me, and holy is his name.”

Luke 1:46-49

Sunday

In Mark's prediction of the passion on the road to Jerusalem today, we are reminded of the purpose of the journey. The Great Fast is our liturgical experience of these events. We are preparing for the coming of the kingdom of God with Christ's resurrection.

We see that this understanding is lacking in the apostles, they ask for positions of power. They assume, with the rest of the nation that will wave palms in one week, that Jesus is the earthly king. But we end this gospel with the call to service.

“God wants
for nothing
and has need
of nothing.
Yet, when
he humbled
himself, he
produced
such great
good,
increased his
household
and
extended his
kingdom.
Why, then,
are you
afraid that
you will
become less
if you
humble
yourself?”

Sostom On
the
Incomprehe
nsible
Nature of
God 8.47