

How to Benefit Spiritually from Pascha Week

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1. Our Behavior Inside and Outside of Church

It is very noticeable that many people during Pascha Week are one thing inside church and completely different outside. In side church, black curtains, somber hymns, solemn readings, and concentrating on the suffering of Christ. Outside of church, we often laugh, joke around, socialize, think and talk about many worldly issues. We lose all the spiritual depth that we gained inside church. Let us concentrate our thoughts, conversations, and meditations around the events of this holy week and the Passion of our Savior.

2. Retreat

During our regular fasting days, we put the words of the bible before us, “Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly.” (Joel 1:14). How much more then should we apply this commandment during Holy Week? This week should be characterized by solitude and retreat with God, by staying away from idle discussions and various means of entertainment of pleasure. Reserve your time to God and to spiritual activities worthy of this week.

In the first hour of the Monday of the Holy Pascha, we read Saint Shenouda’s homily, which warns us: “Brethren if we want o escape God’s punishment and find mercy in His eyes, let us sit every evening alone by ourselves and search our souls...”

3. Follow the Steps of Christ

Meditate on the events of the week one by one: from Palm Sunday, when Christ refused His worldly kingdom and the Jews gave up their hope in Him, until they crucified and buried Him. On Palm Sunday, ask yourself, “Is Christ King and Lord over everything in my life? Do I, like Christ, turn down worldly glory for spiritual and eternal glory? During the General Funeral Service, do I consider myself attending my own funeral?”

And when the church denounces Judas’ traitorous kiss on the eve of the Wednesday of Pascha Week, ask yourself in prayer, “How often, O Lord have I betrayed You? How many times have I told You words of love in prayers, while my actions show the opposite and my heart is far away from You?”

4. Share in the Fellowship of His Suffering

Saint Paul said, “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being conformed to His death.” (Philippians 3:10) Can we give ourselves an exercise this week to share in the fellowship of His suffering and be conformed to His death? Can we follow Him in His suffering and ascend with Him to

the Cross? Can we say with Saint Paul, “With Christ I have been crucified; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” ? (Galatians 2:20).

Therefore, in order for Christ to live in us, we have to carry our cross and follow Him. If you have a cross in your life, do not complain about it. Instead, rejoice in it and bear it for Christ’s sake. “for to you has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him but to suffer for His sake.” (Philippians 1:29).

5. Asceticism

Whoever puts the suffering of Christ before him will not take any pleasure in eating and drinking or pampering the body. But in order to succeed in pursuing asceticism, we must satisfy our souls with spiritual food so that it may thrive and overcome physical hunger. It was customary for the Church to fast until at least the 9th hour on normal fasting days and until sunset during the Holy Week of Pascha.

Saint Athanasius even declared that this period of Holy Week should be received with “longer prayers, fasts, and vigils so that we may be able to anoint our lintels with precious blood and escape the destroyer.” And again, the blessed saint says, “Let us thus engage in the holy fasts, as having been prescribed by Him, and by means of which we find the way to God.”

6. Spiritual Readings

Spiritual readings are also food for the soul. The church has organized for us a treasure of appropriate readings for every day of the Holy Week, comprised of Gospel readings, Old Testament prophecies that correspond to the events of each day, spiritual explanations and sermons of the Church Fathers. On Bright Saturday (Apocalypse night) the church reads the entire Book of Revelation.

7. Hymns

The hymns of the Pascha Week are moving and full of spiritual depth. Hymns, like reading, preserve the thought from wandering and guide it in spiritual direction. We should continue to recite the hymns while walking, meditating, resting.

8. Prayer

Since the prayers of the Agpeya are not used during Holy Week, we are to substitute personal prayers in their place, in addition to the intensive prayers of the church, asking the Lord who bore the sins of the world and died for us, to forgive and have mercy upon us according to His great mercy.

9. Confession and Communion

During this week, each person must sit with himself and remember his sins and put them on Christ's shoulders and tell Him in shame, "Carry O Lord my sins too, with the sins of the rest of humanity. Take my sins and nail them to the Cross with You, so that Your Blood may wipe them away!"

Look carefully at your sins and know that they are the cause of His crucifixion. Many people cry out of their sorrow for Christ's suffering while they crucify Him every day with their sins. We should not feel sorry for Christ during this week, but should be sorry for our sins that caused Him these pains. As Jesus told the women that were crying over Him, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not cry for Me, but cry for yourselves and your children." (Luke 23:28).

Before the Cross, we all stand as sinners, all under the condemnation. "no one is righteous, not even one." (Psalm 14:3). We confess our sins and prepare ourselves for communion. There are three liturgies during Holy Week: on Passover Thursday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday (Preceded, of course, by the Liturgy of Palm Sunday).

10. Spiritual Storage

Pascha Week is not an opportunity to benefit for a week only, but a time to store up spiritual nourishment enough to last the whole year, particularly needed during the 50 days after the Resurrection when there is no fasting.