

REMEMBERING THE DEPARTED

MEMORIALS, PRAYER, JUDGEMENT AND PSIHOSABBATA (SATURDAY OF SOULS) AS WE APPROACH GREAT LENT

THE CHURCH'S PRAYER FOR THE DEPARTED

At every Divine Service, the Holy Orthodox Church offers up prayers for her departed children.

Special prayers and Troparia are read at Compline (Night Service) and Nocturns (Midnight Service), and at Vespers and Matins the departed are remembered in the Litany of Fervent Supplication. At the Divine Liturgy the departed are commemorated at the Proskomedia, in the Litany following the Gospel and when It is truly meet... is sung. In addition, it is customary to have a Service for the departed on Saturdays, unless this coincides with a feast on that day.

THE THIRD DAY

On the third day after death, it is customary to commemorate the departed, since they had been baptized in the Name of the Holy Trinity-Father, Son and Holy Spirit and had kept the Orthodox Faith they received at Holy Baptism. In addition, as the Apostolic Constitutions point out: Let the third day of the departed be celebrated with psalms and lessons, and prayers, on account of Him Who arose within the space of three days (Bk. 8, Ch. 42), that is, in honour of the Third-Day Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE NINTH DAY

On the ninth day after death, the Orthodox Church offers prayers for the departed both in remembrance of the living [Apost. Const.] and that the departed soul be counted worthy to be numbered among the choir of the Saints, through the prayers and intercessions of the nine ranks of Angels.

THE FORTIETH DAY

From earliest times the Church had commanded that the departed be commemorated during the course of forty days and on the fortieth day itself, for so did the people lament Moses after his

death [Apost. Const.]. This is also done in remembrance of the victory of Christ over Satan after He had spent forty days in fasting and prayer. The Church also commemorates the departed on the yearly anniversary of death and, in some places, on the twentieth day, and the third, sixth and ninth months, as well. It is also customary to commemorate the departed on their birthdays and patronal Saint's days.

Kollyva (boiled wheat, often decorated with icing sugar and seasoned with cinnamon, raisins, nuts, pomegranates) is often offered on these days of commemoration. The grain signifies that the dead will again rise from the grave by God's might, for both the grain (sown in the ground) and the fruit (which falls on the ground) decay first and then afterwards bring forth abundant, ripe and whole fruit. Sugar signifies that after the Resurrection of the righteous, there will come a joyful and blessed life in the Kingdom of Heaven, rather than one bitter and sorrowful. Cinnamon the spice of life, pomegranates are the glory of the Kingdom, nuts; bones. Flour; earth, from where we came and where we are to return. Making kollyva can be very edifying and fun.

As St. Simeon of Thessalonica says:

The Third Day Service is celebrated for the reason that the departed one received his being through the Trinity and having passed to a state of good being and being changed he shall [at the Resurrection] appear in his original state or one superior. **The Ninth Day** is celebrated that his spirit dwell together with the holy spirits the Angels being immaterial and naturally similar to them for these spirits are nine in number and by them [the orders] they triply proclaim and praise the God in Trinity and so that he may be united with the holy spirits of the Saints. **The Fortieth Day** is celebrated because of the Saviour's Ascension which came to pass after so many days, after His Resurrection in the sense that [the reposed], as it were, having also risen and having ascended... being caught away in the clouds, shall meet the Judge and thus being

united with Him, he should ever be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:17).

Now the third, sixth and ninth months are also celebrated as proclaiming the Trinity, the God of all, and to His glory in behalf of the deceased, for by the Trinity a man is fashioned, and when loosed from the body he returns to Him, and by the Trinity he hopes to receive resurrection. But the end of the year is celebrated because it is the consummation, and our God, the Trinity, is the Life of all and the Cause of being, and shall be the Restoration of all and the Renewal of human nature [On Things Done for the Departed].

In general, the custom of observing prayers for the dead has been held by the Orthodox Church since earliest times. The Divine Liturgy has always been celebrated in memory of the departed and, on these days, many have increased and continue to increase their offerings in the Church, assisting the poor and needy brethren out of love for their departed loved ones.

In addition to these personal days for remembrance of the departed, the Church has also set aside a number of universal days of commemoration. These are:

MEATFARE SUNDAY

This Saturday falls during Meatfare Week, which is the last week for eating meat before the start of the Great Fast. On the following day, Meatfare Sunday, the Church commemorates the Dread Judgment of Christ, and for this reason, on the Saturday before she prays for all who have departed in faith and hope of Resurrection, that Christ show mercy to them at the Universal Judgment. This commemoration dates from very ancient times and here the Church especially prays for those who have met untimely deaths and have been left without a proper funeral.

SECOND, THIRD AND FOURTH SATURDAYS OF GREAT LENT

Since the usual Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is not celebrated on the weekdays of Great Lent, but rather the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, it is the accepted custom of the Church to commemorate the dead on these three Saturdays (the other Saturdays being dedicated to special celebrations: St. Theodore

on the 1st Saturday, the Akathist to the Theotokos on the 5th, and the Resurrection of Lazarus on the 6th), so that the dead not be deprived of the Church's saving intercession.

TRINITY SATURDAY

On this day (the Saturday before Holy Pentecost) the Church asks that the saving grace of the Holy Spirit wash away the sins from the souls of all our forefathers, fathers and brethren that have reposed from all the ages, asking that they all be united in the Kingdom of Heaven.

PRAYER FOR THE DEPARTED

Among the spirits of the righteous perfected in faith, give rest, O Savior, to the soul(s) of Your servant(s), keeping it (them) in the blessed life which is from You, O loving One.

In Your place of rest, O Lord, where all Your Saints repose, give rest also to the soul(s) of Your servant(s), for You alone are immortal.

Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

You are our God who descended into Hades and loosened the pains of those who were held captive. Grant rest also, O Savior, to the soul(s) of Your servant(s).

Now and forever and to the ages of ages.

You the only pure and spotless Virgin, who ineffably gave birth to God, intercede for mercy and forgiveness of the soul(s) of your servant(s).

O God of spirits and of all flesh, You trampled upon death and abolished the power of the devil, giving life to Your world. Give rest to the soul(s) of Your departed servant(s) (Name) in a place of light, in a place of green pasture, in a place of refreshment, from where pain, sorrow, and sighing have fled away. As a good and loving God, forgive every sin he (she, they) has (have) committed in word, deed, or thought, for there is no one who lives and does not sin. You alone are without sin. Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your word is truth.

For You are the resurrection, the life, and the repose of Your departed servant(s) (Name), Christ our God, and to You we offer glory, with Your eternal Father who is without beginning and Your all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

THE TRISAGION SERVICE

• It begins with the familiar Trisagion prayer: “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.” Indeed the Service is named Trisagion because it begins in this way. Then follows a petition to the Holy Trinity, and the Lord’s Prayer. Then come four hymns:

“With the spirits of the righteous made perfect, give rest, O Saviour, to the soul of Your servant...”

“In Your eternal peace, O Lord, where all Your Saints are reposing, also rest...”

“You are our God Who descended into Hades and ended the sufferings of all who were in prison...”

“O only pure and spotless holy Virgin... intercede for the salvation of the soul of your servant.”

• Then follow several petitions and a prayer by the Priest for the remission of the sins of the departed

• Then the final blessing, in which we ask God to grant the departed “rest in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

• The closing exclamation, “May your memory be eternal, our brother, (or sister), worthy to be deemed happy and ever to be remembered.”

One may ask, why do we pray for those that have died? It is true that there can be no repentance after we die, a person’s eternal destiny is determined immediately after death, and we cannot really expect our prayers to snatch an unbeliever from a state of evil and misery to the state of sanctity and blessedness. Why then do we pray for the dead? It is because praying for the dead is an expression of love. We ask God to remember the departed because we love them. Love survives death and transcends it.

We pray for those who have died, just as we pray for those who are living because we are all members of Christ’s Church. Two parts are distinguished as constituting the Church: the **Church Militant** and the **Church Triumphant**. To the first belong those who are still struggling on earth and fighting the good fight of faith and piety. The Church

Triumphant are those who have died, those who fought well and have been crowned.

KONTAKION AND PSALM 119

With the Saints give rest, O Christ, to the soul of Your servant where sickness and sorrow are no more, neither sighing, but life everlasting.

Psalm 119, the verbal icon of the righteous man who has total trust in God and total devotion and love for his Divine Law, the verbal icon of Jesus Christ, is chanted over the departed, with its praises and supplications for life in God. It is this same psalm which is chanted over the tomb of Christ on Great Friday.

It is the psalm which sings of the victory of righteousness and life over wickedness and death.

“My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to Your word” (Ps 119:25).

“Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way” (Ps 119:37).

“Behold, I long for Your precepts; in revive me in Your righteousness” (Ps 119:40).

The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting; give me understanding, and I shall live” (Ps 119:144).

Plead my cause, and redeem me; give me life according to Thy promise (Ps 119:154).

MEMORIAL SERVICE REGULATION

The Memorial Services are held as an act of love and remembrance towards the departed members of the Church. They are not, however, held on the following days:

From the Saturday of Lazarus until the Sunday of Saint Thomas.

On the feast days of our Lord:
Circumcision of our Lord (1 January)
Epiphany (6 January)
The Presentation (2 February)
The Annunciation (25 March)
The Ascension (40 days after Pascha)
Pentecost (50 days after Pascha)
The Transfiguration (6 August)
Christmas Day (25 December).
On the Feast of the Parish Church.

On the 15 August, the Dormition of the Virgin Mary.

