

HOLY THURSDAY EVENING AND HOLY FRIDAY

Magazine pages 11–13

Christ's suffering, pain and death reveal His understanding and presence for all of us who experience pain and suffering at some points in our lives.

MATERIALS

- *Journey through Holy Week* zine for each student
- Recordings of the hymns from pages 11–13 and a way to play them (CD player or computer with Internet connection to stream from <http://lent.goarch.org/media/audio.asp>)
- Questions from Step 5 for distribution to small groups

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- **Identify with** Christ's suffering in His last days on earth.
- **Interpret** expressions of the paradox of Jesus's full divinity and humanity.
- **Invite** Christ's life-giving light into their own suffering and challenging moments.

INTRODUCTION

This lesson includes the service of the twelve Gospel readings on Holy Thursday evening, Christ's burial on Holy Friday afternoon, and His funeral on Holy Friday evening. The most important point in the services and the lesson is that Christ brings together His full divinity with His full humanity. He feels pain and fear, prays, suffers terrible physical pain, dies, and is buried in a fully human way, yet is still God. The lesson focuses on the hymns of each service, because these hymns highlight the contrast between all-powerful God, and the suffering and dying of Jesus Christ the man. The lesson concludes with the assurance that no matter what suffering or problems we face, God understands because He Himself has experienced it. Christ fills our "darkness" with light, and is present with us in our suffering, just as He was completely humanly present in His own suffering.

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, the source of all wisdom and truth, send down upon us the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of discernment. Enlighten the eyes of our souls with the light of Your knowledge, that we may learn from Your wisdom and grow in virtue, to the glory of Your name. Amen.

PROCEDURES

1. Focusing activity

Have students recall a time when they were going through a difficult or painful challenge, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. Allow a couple of minutes for them to think about this.

Ask students to record their thoughts on paper. Allow students to share if they choose to. Don't force anyone.

2. Name present praxis

Ask students to share what they did during that time, to help them deal with whatever they were experiencing. You can guide this by asking questions such as:

- Did you talk about it with friends/family, ask for help, or withdraw from others to deal with it on your own?
- Did you try to take your mind off of it?
- Did you try to solve your problem?
- Did you pray?

Again, it might be a good idea for them to note their thoughts on paper.

3. Reflect on present praxis

The main question to ask at this point is: "What were you hoping/looking for, when you were praying, seeking help, withdrawing (*whatever the previous responses were*)?"

4. Access the Christian story and vision

Read pages 11–13.

Share with students:

- When Christ Himself felt afraid and lonely, He "dealt with it" like many of us do. We see this on Holy Thursday evening, when He prayed alone in the Garden of Gethsemane.

HOLY THURSDAY EVENING

We enter into Christ's darkest hours, when in His final earthly days, He is betrayed and gives Himself up to be crucified. We spend a lot of time listening to twelve Gospel accounts of these events.

We go with Jesus to the garden of Gethsemane, where His prayer shows us that He is completely human and completely obedient to His Father. He knows that He is going to die, which brings Him intense pain. He first asks His Father to take the pain away, but then says "not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36). Because He is really human, it really hurts that He must be unjustly crucified. Because He is a perfect human, He obeys out of love for His Father and for the rest of us, whom He saves by His crucifixion and resurrection. All of us can relate to the prayer to "make it go away" when we have to deal with something painful. It's okay to pray this, but Christ shows us the next step—accepting and trusting God's will.

The hymns we hear focus on a great contrast. Christ, who is our God, is treated as a lowly criminal. Each phrase of the hymn compares ideas of Christ's glory with details of His suffering:

Today is hung upon the tree, He who suspended the land in the midst of the waters.

A crown of thorns crowns Him, who is the king of angels. He is wrapped about with the purple of mockery, who wrapped the heavens with clouds.

He received buffetings, who freed Adam in the Jordan. He was transfixed with nails, the Bridegroom of the Church. He was pierced with a spear, the Son of the Virgin. We worship your passion, O Christ. Show us also your glorious resurrection.

This can be a long service, with lots of standing still, lots of trying to pay attention to the readings. Try to focus on the stories, listening or reading along, because the whole story is about each and every one of us. It's okay to feel a little antsy or tired. It's okay if your feet hurt. Let those hurting feet stand with Christ in His physical and emotional pain on this day. Remember that He endured our every human pain and discomfort, walking obediently through it during these last days of His earthly life.

Crucifixion

- The plaque at the top of the cross has Greek letters that abbreviate "The King of Glory." Jesus' Death 267-10 and John 18:33-37. How do these two passages relate to one another and to the cross?
- There is a small skull in the earth below the cross, at the very bottom of the foot. It reminds us that Jesus was crucified at "the place of the skull," Golgotha. A tradition teaches that this is the skull of Adam, the first human.
- Read Matthew 27:54 to see what the centurion (Roman army officer) is saying. According to Orthodox tradition, his name is Longinus. He is a saint of the Church, and his feast day is October 16.

His prayer shows us that He is completely human and obedient.

- Refer to page 11 to highlight that even though Christ prayed the very human wish, for the relief that His suffering would "go away," He was a *perfect* human, obedient and trusting His Father no matter what was going to happen to Him.
- Our belief in Jesus Christ's full humanity and full divinity is one of the most defining parts of our faith.

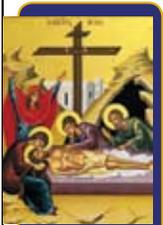
The next part of the lesson will help students to engage with the hymns from the services of Holy Week, which are **a tool to help us keep a proper view of Christ: worshipping Him for filling our humanity with His divinity.**

Play a recording of each of the hymns for the class. Have students focus on the words from the text while they listen. You might also play the recordings while the students work on the questions.

Note: Various recordings will use different translations, so most likely what the students read and what they will hear will be different.

Divide students into three pairs or three groups of three (depending on your class size), to closely read about the hymns from the three services, and answer the following questions:

HOLY FRIDAY AFTERNOON



Epitaphios

• Mary Magdalene is the woman wearing a red cloak. A tradition says that when she saw the body of Christ lying on the ground, she threw her arms in the air and cried, "Who will let these things be heard by all the world? I shall go down to Hades to the Christ. I shall show him what evil Pitaké has done."

• When the Gospels tell the story of the burial of Jesus, they name Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and a group of women. The stories do not mention the presence of the Virgin Mary (who is about to give birth to Jesus). Check the prologue and Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:40; Luke 23:55; and John 19:39-40.

When we come to church on the afternoon of Holy Friday, we are attending the burial of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Every image and object we see, every step we take, is part of our solemn mourning for the death of Christ. We remember the very devoted man who took down the body of Christ from the cross, Joseph of Arimathea. After Joseph removed the body of Jesus, he anointed it with oil, and then he "wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb."

Christ is real. His death is real. To see His lifeless body on the cross, to reach up and carry His weight down, is real. We respect Joseph's act of love and devotion, and we respect the realness of Christ's death on the cross reading when we hear the story of Christ's crucifixion and death once again, the icon wraps the icon in white linen. After Joseph took down the body of Christ, he prepared it for burial and carried the body to a new tomb. The priest represents this by carrying the Epitaphios icon, a beautiful cloth icon showing Christ's body being prepared for burial, around the church and placing it in the kouvakion, which symbolizes the tomb of Christ. During the procession, we hear the hymn:

When Joseph of Arimathea took You, the Life of all, now dead, down from the cross, he buried You in fine linen, after anointing You with myrrh. He yearned with desire, humbly contained by awe, rejoicing, he cried out to You: Glory to Your condescension, O merciful God!

Notice that the priest chants to God, who condescended to die on the cross. This means that our all-powerful Lord and Creator decided to do something He didn't have to do—to become a man and die like a man, out of love. Joseph held a dead man in his arms, but we never forget that this man was God Himself.



HOLY FRIDAY EVENING



Holy Friday evening is filled with melodies and customs that are hundreds of years old. Bright, colorful flowers decorate the tomb of Christ. There is a long procession around the church. We hold candles as we sing familiar hymns. These are the things we hear, see, smell, and do during this evening's service.

We begin by descending with Christ into the tomb, where He was buried. In Hades—the place where the dead go—He rescues Adam, Eve, and all of humanity which holds the Epitaphios. We light our way with candles and we sing the Trisagion hymn: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!"

We stop a few times during our walk around the church, and the priest intones or sings petitions. We respond with "Lord, have mercy!" At the end of the procession, the kouvakion may be held high for us to pass underneath on our way back into the church. This symbolizes our passing from death to life.

In the church, the priest brings the Epitaphios into the altar, circles the table with it three times, and lays it on the holy altar table. It will stay here until the Feast of the Ascension, forty days after Pascha.

You may notice that the priest is wearing brightly colored vestments, which show joy. What is joyful about being at the funeral of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Aren't we in mourning?

We experience here something called "joyful sadness" (in Greek, *chomolyte, gopoliakumi*). How can we be joyful and sad at the same time? We know how tragic and unjust it is for anyone to die, especially Christ. But we also know that His death will lead to His resurrection, and to the resurrection of us all. We know that when Christ enters the place of death, Hades, He has filled it with life. He has taken its power and transformed death from a tragic end into a joyful beginning.

As we shift from sorrow into joy, we hear one of the most exciting Old Testament prophecies. God shows the prophet Ezekiel a valley of "very dry bones." At the Lord's command, Ezekiel speaks to the bones, and they begin to rise and are covered with flesh. He then speaks to them, and then they begin breathing and stand up. God promises to put His Spirit in them, and they will live again. On the night that Christ confronts death, we learn that we are all made for life.

Shift from sorrow into joy

from eternal death. On Holy Friday evening, the Giver of Life is in this place of darkness; the Giver of Life is in this place of death. We must remember this as we hear and sing a series of hymns.

At one point, we sing a conversation between a mother and her innocent son who has been killed. What does this mother say? "O, my most sweet springtime! O, my son beloved, where does your beauty go?"

Her son responds, "Do not lament, mother. I suffer the passion to free Adam and Eve."

Have you ever heard a mother call her child "springtime"? Mary, the Mother of God, calls her Son "springtime." And her Son, Jesus, says, "Don't worry, mother. I know what I'm doing."

Part of Christ's funeral is the procession around the outside of the church. We walk behind the tomb of Christ,

A. Read the hymn on page 11, which begins "Today is hung upon the tree, He who suspended the land in the midst of the waters." What do you notice about the imagery of the contrast in each verse? Why do you think we chant this hymn at this service?

B. Read the hymn on page 12, about Joseph of Arimathea anointing Jesus after His death. What is important about this person?

C. On page 13, we read about the Lamentation hymns, the conversation between Mary and her son, Jesus. Why do you think this hymn is set up as a conversation? How does this help us worship during Christ's funeral service?

Give students about ten minutes to discuss each of the questions, and then regroup the class to share responses. Answers might include:

- A. Each image . . .
 - Hung on the tree/suspended land in the waters
 - Crown of thorns/king of angels
 - Wrapped with mockery/wrapped heavens with clouds
 - Received buffetings/freed Adam

Transfixed with nails/bridegroom of Church Pierced with a spear/son of the virgin Passion/Resurrection

. . . contrasts weakness and power, bondage and freedom. We pray this hymn on Holy Thursday evening to bring home the reality of our faith: how very wrong it was to bring death to the life-giving one; and to remind us that the one who died was God Himself.

B. Joseph of Arimathea is important because he demonstrates his love, respect, and devotion by giving Jesus a proper burial place. As he cares for Christ in the same way he would care for any other person, he is an example of someone who has faith that the man on the cross is more than just a man. We remember him at this service, to remind us of how real Christ's human death was.

C. The conversation between Mary and Jesus "brings home" His humanity, by highlighting His relationship with His mother. Mary, of course, is very sad at the death of her Son. At the same time, her disbelief shows that her Son is God Himself.

5. Appropriate the story and vision

Direct students' attention to the prophecy of Ezekiel described at the bottom of page 13, when he has a vision of dry bones coming back to life. Explain to students:

- **The focus shifts from Christ to us.**
- We read this prophecy on Holy Friday evening, to remind us that Christ's death will lead to life for all of us.
- On page 12, we are reminded that **"On the night that Christ confronts death, we learn that we are all made for life."**

Ask students:

- Why do we hold brightly lit candles in the darkness on Holy Friday evening?

Guide them to the conclusion:

- We hold candles because the light of Christ fills and overpowers the darkness of death and suffering.

Help students to relate this to their own lives, that **Christ can fill us with light even through our own "dark" times, because He Himself suffered a dark time, too.**

Highlight the reference on page 13 to *charmolype* (pronounced har-mo-lee-pee), which means "joyful sadness."

- Because of Christ, this is how we worship Him in His suffering, and this is how we can deal with our own suffering.
- Jesus experienced suffering, betrayal, and burial to give meaning to our own painful and challenging experiences.
- This also explains why we sing "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us" at Christ's funeral. We know that we are the ones who need His mercy, and we believe that even as we mourn His death, we

know because of His resurrection that He will grant us that mercy.

6. Decision for lived response

Invite students to think again about the challenging experience that they had brought to mind at the beginning of the lesson. Ask:

- The next time a sad event or challenge happens, how will you let Christ's light brighten your darkness?
- How will you have peace and hope in Christ's presence even in a difficult time?
- How will you allow the challenges of your own life to unite you to Christ?

These are tough questions. Allow them to "hang" for a few minutes, and then allow students to share if they want. Some answers to look for:

- Praying for strength; trying to be thankful for the good things; keeping a small icon or prayer rope with me to remind me that Christ understands and is with me; reading Scripture; talking to someone trustworthy.

Closing Prayer

Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian

O Lord and Master of my life, deliver me from the spirit of laziness, meddling, vain ambition, and idle talk.

Grant to me, Your servant, the spirit of prudence, humility, patience, and love.

Yes, Lord and King; grant me that I may see my own faults, and to not judge my brothers and sisters, for You are blessed to the ages of ages. Amen.