



HOLY FRIDAY

Immortal Life

THE HYMN

Vespers Service on Holy Friday

"When You descended unto death, O Lord who yourself are immortal Life, then did You mortify Hades by the lightning flash of Your Divinity. Also when You raised the dead from the netherworld, all the Powers of the heavens were crying out: O Giver of life, Christ our God, glory to You."

THE SERMON

The Fulfillment

On Holy Friday, the following three services are usually conducted: the Service of the Great Hours, the Descent from the Cross (Apokathelosis), and the Service of the Lamentations. In this manner, we re-enact throughout our parishes the fulfillment of the mystery of the Incarnation, from the sacrifice on the Cross, to the removal of the Body, and finally, the burial of Christ. The hymns that form part of these sacred services are theologically significant.

We are compelled to participate in the trial and Crucifixion of the peace-loving Jesus with all our souls. As His beloved Mother, the Theotokos, weeps and laments, how can we remain unmoved? How can we prevent the outpouring of emotion at the sight of the elevation of the Cross? How do we rationalize that the Ruler of Life would accept death and burial?



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DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Today, He who holds the entire creation in His palm is enclosed in the tomb. Today, He who covered the heavens with His Holiness is covered by the tombstone. Today, Life immortal falls asleep. Yet, the gravedigger Hades trembles at the might of this deceased. Today, Adam is freed from the bonds of disobedience, decay, and death.

What exactly is taking place? Christ, the King of all ages, fulfills the redemptive plan of God the Father through His Crucifixion. He then descends into Hades. He breaks the bonds of death and liberates the dead. The hymns convey that Christ did not simply open the gates of Hades, but that He *smashed* them open. He did not just loosen the bonds of death, but He *broke* them apart. Christ acts in an enduring and lasting manner. So that death can no longer have power over us. So that we fear sin no more. Through the sacrifice of Christ, we can now personally overcome sin through repentance. We are not afraid of death because we know that even when we enter the tomb, just like Christ did, the Resurrection awaits us as well.

Out of love, Christ suffers to free us from the urge to sin. Jesus willingly accepts death to overthrow our death. Out of obedience to the Father, the Son descends into Hades to proclaim His Gospel to the dead, and resurrect all who believe in Him. In His Gospel, Christ reveals that God loves us and will not abandon us. With His death, He realized the loving promise of salvation God made to the first humans. With His Resurrection, Christ takes us up with Him to the Kingdom of God.

Our feeble human nature cannot express God's immeasurable patience for us. Our minds simply cannot grasp the magnitude of His love. Upon His feet nailed to the Cross, we forsake *our* sins. In His tomb, we rest *our* hope. We worship Him, we adore Him, we love Him, and we cry out to Him as loud as we can in the Lamentations: *"How can You be hidden in a dark, unlit tomb, O my Jesus, being sweet and salvific light? Your forbearance is ineffable, O Lord. Arise, O loving Savior, and also resurrect us from Hades and perdition. Arise now, O Life-giver!"*