



HOLY MONDAY

Behold, the Bridegroom Is Coming

THE HYMN

Bridegroom Service on Holy Monday

"Behold, the Bridegroom is coming in the middle of the night; and blessed is the servant He shall find awake and watching; unworthy is the other He shall find being lazy. So beware, O soul of mine, be not overcome by sleep, so that you not be handed over to death and be shut out from the Kingdom. Come to your senses and cry aloud: Holy, holy, holy are You our God. By the intercessions of the Saints save us."

THE SERMON

Are We Ready to Receive the Bridegroom Christ?

"Behold, the Bridegroom is Coming" is one of the most cherished hymns of Holy Week. It is quite fitting that during the first part of Holy Week, from the evening of Palm Sunday until the evening of Holy Tuesday, we conduct services which are known as "Bridegroom Services."

For the Apostles and Fathers of the Church, the Church is figuratively likened to a Bride wedded to Christ. Christ Is the Bridegroom. The Book of Revelations describes in detail the spiritual union of the Bridegroom Christ with the Body of the Church. The Body of the Church includes *all* of us. Through His human nature, Christ unites Himself with *us*. This union takes place on the Cross, where the incarnate Son and Word of God empties Himself. In turn, this emptying enables our own salvation. We experience this union with Christ in all the sacraments of the Church, especially during every Divine Liturgy. When we



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receive His Body and Blood in Holy Communion, we savor God's providence in its fullness. However, our complete and perfect union with God will only take place at the time of the Second Coming of Christ and the Final Judgment. At a sudden and unspecified moment in time, we will be fully embraced by God and enter His Kingdom.

For the moment, we remain watchful as the Bridegroom comes to be crucified. He walks towards Golgotha (or Calvary) for the purpose of uniting Himself with us, in order to take upon Himself the sins of the whole world, including our own. He comes to redeem us from spiritual death and deliver us from the bonds of sin. He comes to save us. The Bridegroom hymn directs us to be ready to receive Him.

Let us for a moment compare this to the preparations a bride makes when planning her wedding. She naturally wants everything to be perfect. She has already spent the time getting to know her future husband. She needs to be sure that their love is genuine. For his part, the groom nervously waits for his bride at church. And when they meet for the sacrament of marriage, their faces glimmer with joy. They are ready to savor their union, their common journey of marriage, and their love for each other. Let us approach the Bridegroom Christ with the same, if not more, attention and care. Let us yearn for our union with Him. Let us spiritually prepare ourselves as thoroughly as we can in order to receive Him as completely as possible.

Behold, the Bridegroom comes to redeem us. He offers His hand to us. But we also need to cooperate with Him for our salvation. We are invited to note our weaknesses and recognize our own sinfulness. We are encouraged to accept Christ as our Savior and Redeemer and to truly repent. Let us study the Scriptures and discover the Bridegroom of our souls. Let us take inspiration from the words of the Fathers to grow spiritually. Let us rejoice in prayer and praise the Lord. Let us experience the sacraments of our Church as mystical encounters with God Himself. Let us approach others with mercy, and faithfully carry out the *divine* commandment of love. Let us participate in the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ.

Sisters and brothers, let us *prepare* to receive the Lord. Let us not be overwhelmed by spiritual apathy. Let us make a new beginning in our lives. Let us take a long hard look at ourselves and honestly examine our hearts: are we *ready* to receive the Bridegroom Christ?