



## HOLY TUESDAY

### Woman Offered the Fragrant Oil

#### THE HYMN

##### Bridegroom Service on Holy Tuesday Evening

*"When the sinful woman offered the fragrant oil, then the disciple made his agreement with the transgressors of the Law. She rejoiced in pouring out the costly oil, and he lost no time in selling off the priceless One. She acknowledged the Master, and he was becoming estranged from the Master. She was emancipated, while Judas became a slave of the enemy. How dreadful was his rashness! How great was her repentance! Grant me this repentance, O Savior who suffered for us, and save us."*

#### THE SERMON

##### How Great Is the Repentance?

We often associate the evening service on Holy Tuesday with the woman who anointed Christ's feet with myrrh. Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrays Christ, also figures prominently in the hymns designated for this day. It may be useful for our own self-awareness to consider how the Church approaches Judas and the sinful woman.

The Byzantine hymns of Holy Week are profound works of art, especially the *Hymn of the Fallen Woman* composed by the nun Kassiani. Byzantine historical chronicles preserve the dialogue that ensued when Kassiani was presented to Emperor Theophilus as a prospective bride. Dazzled by her beauty, Theophilus purportedly said: "from a woman the baser things came into the world," referring to Eve's transgression and the Fall from Paradise. Kassiani responded in a witty but immensely theological manner: "but also from



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a woman came forth the better things,” referring to the hope of salvation resulting from Christ’s Incarnation through the Virgin Mary. We often tend to accept indiscriminately that a woman is the cause of the Fall. But we overlook that Adam was a willing accomplice in the apostasy and is jointly responsible for the exile from paradise. Adam and Eve share equally the burden of sin entering into the world.

As followers of Christ, we also know that the Most Holy Theotokos, as the new Eve, played a significant role in God’s plan for the salvation of the world. She gave birth to the Savior Christ, the new Adam. As a result, the sin of the first humans no longer has power over us. All of us, men and women alike, can be free from sin. The sin of the world has been taken upon by Christ. Gender has no relevance in this regard. We are all sinners, and have an equal opportunity for salvation. We are all created in the image of God.

The hymns of the Church on Holy Tuesday provide us with added perspectives to assist us in our journey to Pascha. The sinful woman recognizes that she has strayed away from God’s love through her life choices. She recovers, repents, and runs to the Savior Christ to demonstrate, in a practical manner, her desire to change her life. She wants to be delivered from the burden of sin, and go about life renewed in the light of the Gospel. She wants to be reconciled to God and live her life with self-control, love, and peace. She is driven from sin to virtue. On the other side stands Judas. This disciple had experienced the miracles of Christ up close. He was taught by Christ and was even sent out to work miracles and preach the Gospel. Judas succumbs to the passion of greed. He betrays the Lord and tumbles from the light into darkness, from virtue to sin, from life to loss.

One single moment in life is sufficient to either tempt us to perish or lead us to salvation. But a sincere and simple supplication such as “Lord, have mercy,” can unlock the gates of paradise when offered from the heart. We can all be complicit in Judas’s betrayal, or we can personally take part in the great repentance of the sinful woman. Let us pray that the Lord grants us the willingness to recognize our sinfulness daily and seek repentance. We hope that our Lord and Savior, who suffered immensely for us, will accept our confession as precious myrrh, and save us.