

Thoughts on Pascha

Holy week is the most sacred time of the church year. But that doesn't mean it was made only for holy people. The holy seasons of the year were made for sinners—sinners who want to live better—like you and me. Pascha, this very special week, is designed for the downcast, the anxious, and the troubled. Christ was the holiest man on earth when he came, but he barely spent any time with holy people. In fact, when he went to dine with the “holy,” they treated him with the utmost impoliteness. Instead, his desire and joy was to mingle with the sinners. He looked for the harlot, the tax collector, the thief, the leper, the disabled, and the blind. In other words, he looked for those individuals in whom both society and religion were not interested.

What else is holy week but spending the most intimate time with Christ? Jesus today is not asking how many virtues you have. He is not asking how perfect was your fast. He is not asking how immaculate were your prayers. He is only asking, where are you? He is simply seeking your heart. I would even like to say, at the risk being misunderstood, that he is not asking to which doctrines or opinions you subscribe. Those are questions for another day. Holy week is not a theory—it is rather a deeply existential experience. If you come, even with hesitant and shuffling feet, you will not regret it. Allow yourself to be immersed in the ancient prayers and rituals, and you will break through the dross and glitter that lie on the surface of every day life. You will penetrate into something deeper, and explore spiritual places you never knew.

Do not let your assumptions hold you back. Did you faithfully keep all the rules of fasting? Come to Pascha. Did you not fast at all? Come to Pascha. Have you lived uprightly? Come to Pascha. Have you lived unworthily or shamefully? Come to Pascha. Do you think you are better than most people in church? Come to Pascha, and you will learn that you are not. Do you think that you are not accepted by God? Come to Pascha, and you will learn that you are definitely are. Are you unable to repent? Come to Pascha, and you will find the process mysteriously started for you. In other words, whatever you may believe about yourself, about other people, or about God—come to Jesus in holy week, and you will find your ideas overturned and renewed.

Do not postpone your change. There is no better time than now. Opportunity does not wait for us to be ready. We must enter the fray as we are, ready or not, come what may. We must glean whatever wheat we may find. Harvest time may not come again for a long while; although, truth be told, it is always harvest time. Christ has left wheat, or Easter eggs – whichever you prefer – strewn all over the ground. And like little innocent children, we must run out breathless to gather as much as we can.

If we are to gain anything from this week, we must quiet our doubts for a while. The skeptic within, who with shifting glance constantly whispers into our ear, must take a backseat and keep to himself. The lungs that feed our struggling beliefs must be allowed some fresh air. Our anemic souls are in need of oxygen. During this week, the

dead and limp branches of our tree may come back to life. Holy week was not designed for the pure or for the perfect, but it was designed for us – how we are. Jesus does not demand anything more from us these days than our presence. And if we take time out of our days, and enter into his presence, through the Paschal prayers, then he will give us spiritual gifts that we do not expect. Let us throw out the mental rubbish, the psychological rust, that has held us back for so long. Let us not worry about pleasing a particular person, or group, but let us go to Christ in the full weakness and vulnerability of who we are. We have nothing to prove, but only have ourselves to give away. And in offering him ourselves, we will encounter the unexpected joy of learning that he first gave himself for us.