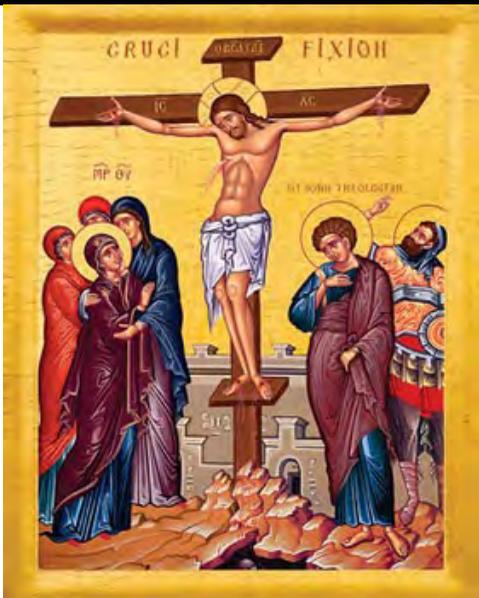


THIRD SUNDAY OF THE GREAT FAST
SUNDAY OF HOLY CROSS



Icon of the Veneration of the Holy Cross

Reflections on the Scripture Readings for this Weekend



On this third weekend of the Great Fast, we humbly “bow before the Cross of Christ” and we praise His Holy Resurrection. As we venerate the Holy Cross this weekend are readings are taken from Paul’s letter to the Hebrews and Mark’s Gospel.

In the reading from Hebrews Paul presents Jesus as the “compassionate” High Priest - the One called by God to lead God’s People in true worship. Paul writes:

Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus let us hold fast to our profession of faith. So let us confidently approach the of grace to receive mercy and favor and to find help in time of need.

Indeed the Cross is a true

symbol of God’s great love for us and His desire to help us understand that the various challenges of life are only meant to bring us to the fullness of life - to bring us to a deep and real trust in Him. Jesus exemplified this true and deep trust in the Father in the way He embraced the challenges given to Him.

This is why the Church has paired the Gospel writing from Mark with Paul’s letter to the Hebrews. Mark shares this exhortation of Jesus:

If a person wishes to come after me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross and follow in my steps. Whoever would preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will preserve it.

The various challenges of life are truly not punishments but opportunities to place our hope and trust in God. Jesus showed us this. Spiritual growth comes when we can embrace the challenges of life as He did. Life presents *unique challenges* to each of us. When we are determined to embrace these challenges and learn from them, we are transformed - we spiritually grow.

This is why the Cross of Christ is the true symbol of the fullness of life and why we decorate the Cross with symbols of life. When we use life’s challenges to transform the way that we think and behave, we become more like Jesus - we actualize more of our potential to be like God.

This, of course, is the meaning and purpose of this human experience. Earthly life is given to us, out to love, so that we might voluntarily transform ourselves into spiritual-human beings - into persons who are more like Jesus. Let us truly embrace life as Jesus did!

Understanding Our Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

So, as I explained, the reason why we distribute Holy Communion during the week days of the Great Fast but do not celebrate the Divine Liturgy, is that on the journey of life, which is a journey of personal transformation, we need the help and support of God. *Theosis* requires a partnership with God. We have to do our part and He, in turn, provides the support, insight, courage and strength to accomplish personal change. In this process of change, our main help is precisely Christ, who makes Himself present to us in Holy Communion. He is the essential food that can keep us spiritually grow.

So our unique tradition calls us to fast from various foods as a means to strengthen our will power to live more and more like Jesus. God then supports us in this effort by being present to us in the Person of Jesus, Who has given us His very Body and Blood to be our spiritual food.

If the Eucharist is incompatible with fasting, one might ask, then why is its celebration still prescribed on Saturdays and Sundays of the Fast and this without “breaking” the fast? The canons of the Church seem here to contradict one another. While some of them forbid fasting on Sundays, some others forbid the breaking of the fast on any of the forty days. This seeming contradiction, however, is apparent only because the two rules which seem to be mutually exclusive refer in fact to two different meanings of the term



fasting. To understand this is important because we discover the Eastern Church’s “philosophy of fasting” which is essential for our spiritual effort.

There are two ways of fasting rooted in both Scripture and Tradition and which correspond to two distinct needs of humans. The first one can be termed a *total* fast for it consists of total abstinence from food and drink. One can define the second one as *ascetical* fast for it consists mainly in abstinence from certain foods and in substantial reduction of one’s diet. The *total* fast, by its very nature, is of short duration and is usually limited to one day or even a part of one day. From the very beginning of Christianity, it has been understood as a state of *preparation* and expectation - a state of spiritual concentration on that which is about to come. This is why we typically have some sort of fast during regular time before we receive Communion. In more recent years that has been mitigated to be only three hours. In older days it was from midnight the day before the reception of Communion. Physical hunger corresponds here to a spiritual expectation of fulfillment, the opening up of our minds and hearts.

The Divine Liturgy and Our Worship of God

In the last issue, I began singling out the prayers that are different in the Liturgy of St. Basil. I covered the antiphons that are a part of the Liturgy of the Word (Psalm 103 and the Beatitudes). Further, like the weeks of the period of preparation for the Great Fast and all holy days, there are special “Tropars and Kondaks” for each week of the Great Fast. These prayers are always closely connected with the special theme of a season or the feast being celebrated.

The next prayers in the Liturgy that are different are the two Prayers of the Faithful. I would draw your attention to these two prayers. The first prayer states that God has revealed to us “this great mystery of salvation.” To me this mystery is the meaning and purpose of human life and how we humans can come to a deeper understanding of it.

The prayer continues and suggests that somehow an understanding of this mystery is closely connected to what we do as a Christian community around God’s “holy altar” - or as we say in the Eastern Church, before His “holy throne.” The prayer then goes on to ask God to “prepare us for this mystery” which is connected with offering God the “sacrifice of praise.”

I have found that it truly helps us to understand what we do in our worship if we understand that the “sacrifice of praise” that we are called to offer is to join with Jesus in offering our lives back to God in *thanksgiving*



for the gift of life itself. Can there be any greater praise given to God than an act of offering ourselves back to Him for the gift of life? I offer myself back to God by deciding and desiring to live my human life in the manner in which God intended when He created me. Jesus demonstrated this in the way that He lived and died.

The prayer concludes by asking God that our offering of our very lives may “be acceptable” to Him. We know this to be true since in doing this we are modeling our lives after the one, true human being, Jesus.

Again, all this means that we pay particular attention to the prayers that we offer as a community and that we mean the prayers that we say and hear, making them our own prayers. This is one reason why our liturgical tradition is so dialogic in nature. The back-and-forth praying of priest and people calls us to make the prayers we offer our own.

Because there is repetition in our style of prayer as a community, we must always guard against just going through the act of praying and focus our attention on meaning the prayers that we say together.



St. Michael's Parish News

A Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in Dearborn Michigan

churchWIDE
RUMMAGE
SALE

COMING THIS FALL

Start cleaning out your cupboards and storage spaces for a major fall fund-raiser. Remember We will not be including (1) clothing or shoes in our sale, (2) items that are not clean and in working order, and (3) books. Thank You!

MIDDLE OF THE GREAT FAST

SOUP LUNCH - Today, March 19th

It has become a tradition here at St. Michael's Parish to mark the half-way point of the Great Fast by a **SOUP LUNCH**. You are kindly requested to make reservations by signing-up on the sheet provided in the vestibule. If you will be bringing a soup, we ask you to indicate that and also to make it "a Lenten Soup" which means no meat or dairy products.



ACTS FOR THE GREAT FAST

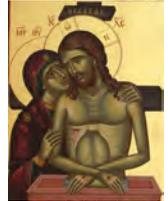


This is the week of the Holy Cross. Why not try being quiet and stop listening to the radio or turning on the television and reading the accounts of Christ's crucifixion that is contained in the four Gospels of the New Testament !

Be not afraid of life. Believe that life is worth living, and your belief will help create the fact

CALLED TO HOLINESS

As I suggested in the last issue of this article, faith calls us to lead an authentic life, that is a life which is lived in accord with our beliefs.



So, the big question we must always ask ourselves is: *What do I really believe?*

What do we believe? We are called to believe that God came into our world Himself in the Person of Jesus in order to show us how to live this earthly life and, therefore, acquire the fullness of life. Jesus taught us how to live. He taught us that in order to be true children of God we must learn how to *unconditionally* love and forgive others. To accomplish this we must not *judge* others and *treat* others as we want to be treated. Embedded in this approach to life is also *love of our enemies*.

Over the years I have found that perhaps the greatest obstacle people encounter to bringing about complete personal change and growing in the likeness of Jesus is this command to love our enemies. Still buried deeply in the psyche of
(Continued on page 8)

A PRAYER A DAY FOR THE GREAT FAST

This year the prayers are based, in part, on the Matins Services of the Great Fast

SUNDAY, MARCH 19th

O my soul, on this day of the Veneration of the Holy Cross of Christ, join with the Church in declaring: Hail, life-giving Cross, the Tree of incorruption that brings humankind the enjoyment of eternal glory. Through you, O Cross, the hosts of demons have been driven back and the hierarchies of angels rejoice with one accord. You are an invincible weapon, an unbroken stronghold. Grant me now the grace and faith to draw near to the Passion of Christ and His Resurrection. For through you, O Cross, the power of death is swallowed up, giving mankind access to heaven. O invincible weapon, glory of martyrs, ornament of saints, haven of salvation, bestow on me and the world great mercy. I ask this of You, who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit to help me. AMEN

MONDAY, MARCH 20th

O Christ our God, of Your own will You accepted crucifixion that all humankind might be restored to life. Taking the quill of the Cross You signed, in the red ink of royalty with bloody fingers, my absolution. I am in danger again of being parted from You. Forsake me not! Take pity on me and all Your people who are in distress, for You alone are longsuffering. Rise up against my enemies in Your almighty power. You alone see that I, like the people during Your time on earth, seem to be lost and do not desire the Kingdom of our Father. Help me and all Christians to become centered on becoming God's children and live in Your likeness. I ask this of You, who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit to help me. AMEN

TUESDAY, MARCH 21st

Behold, the Fashioner and Creator of all hangs naked on the Cross for the salvation of humankind. The Cross proclaims that the Creator so loves His creation that He thought nothing too great to bring about the knowledge of His love. The Savior of all, God Himself, suffered willingly for the salvation and renewal of the world. As I look upon Your Cross, O Lord, and marvel at Your love, I am awe-struck. Help me to do everything within my power to return Your love and embrace the Jesus way of living. I know and believe that life's journey calls me to think and act like Him in order to truly enter into deeper union with You, my all-loving God. I ask this of You, who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit to help me. AMEN

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22nd

Your Cross, O Lord, clothes me with a garment of life. It has been set up on earth and all of creation is filled with boundless joy. Beholding it venerated, help me to raise my voice with faith saying: I bow to Your Cross, O Master, and praise Your third-day resurrection. O Cross of Christ, grant me to worthily venerate you. I ask your help in understanding the great mystery which transpired on you. Help me to join with heaven and earth in offering you praise, O Cross of Christ, for upon you Christ's Body was nailed when He voluntarily offered Himself to Death to crush death and to save humankind. With sincere faith and great joy let me venerate the Cross of Christ. I ask this of You, who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

A PRAYER A DAY FOR THE GREAT FAST

This year the prayers are based, in part, on the Matins Services of the Great Fast

THURSDAY, MARCH 23rd

O my soul, let me drink not from a well of earthly water that perishes, but from the fountain of light which flows forth from the Cross of Christ. For His Cross is the glory of humankind. As I venerate Your Cross, O Christ, I recall that Moses prefigured it with his outstretched arms and guarded Israel's entrance into the Promised Land. By Your Cross, O Lord, You have freed me and all humankind from Death. For no sooner had the wood of Your Cross been set up than the foundations of death were shaken and destroyed. Death swallowed You eagerly, O Lord but, trembling, then let You go. By Your Cross, O Master, You have granted humankind salvation. Therefore I glorify You, O Son of God and render glory to Your Father and Holy Spirit. AMEN

FRIDAY, MARCH 24th

O Christ, You crushed death by Your Cross and rose as my Redeemer. You have recalled me from the depths of the abyss of mortality and granted me immortality. Let me cry out with joy and sing triumphantly to You, O God, as I greet and venerate the Cross of Your Son, Jesus Christ. For His Cross is a fountain of holiness for me and all those in the world. I humbly kiss Your holy Cross, O Christ, which You voluntarily bore upon Your shoulders and on which You accepted to be lifted up and crucified in the flesh. You voluntarily accepted death to show me how to live. Give me the strength to lead a life that imitates how You lived. I ask this of You, who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

SATURDAY, MARCH 25th

O Virgin Mother of God, I join with the Church in celebrating your voluntary consent to cooperate with God in bringing about my salvation. For today the Church celebrates God becoming incarnate as a human in the person of your Son, Jesus. Today I not only stand in awe at your humble submission to God's will but also praise God for the great love He has showered upon me and humankind. I acknowledge that I have not, because of my behaviors, always responded with gratitude for God's love and embraced what He has revealed through His Son Jesus. I humbly ask you, O Blessed Mother, to plead on my behalf to God for the strength and courage to imitate, by the way I live, your Son Jesus. I thank you, O Blessed Mother, for your help. AMEN

SUNDAY, MARCH 26th

O holy father John Climacus, today the Church commemorates your life and commitment to follow Jesus. Truly you have carried on your lips the praises of the Lord and, with great wisdom, have studied the words of Holy Scripture so that you might teach us how to become people who strive to imitate Christ. You have, because of your efforts, gained the riches of grace and become blessed. By your *Sacred Ladder*, father John, you have shown me how to take up the cross life has presented to me and, like Jesus, to carry it without complaint. You have shown me how to imitate Christ and to follow in His steps. I humbly ask you, father John, to ask God, on my behalf, to grant me the courage to climb your *Ladder* for greater union with God. AMEN

Schedule of Services

Sunday, March 19 - Third Weekend of the Great Fast - Tone 3
10:00 AM - Walter Kizel, Halyna Bialczyk

Fourth Week of the Great Fast - Tone 4

Monday, March 20 - Venerable Fathers of St. Sabbas Monastery
No Liturgy Scheduled

Tuesday, March 21 - James of Catania, Bishop-Martyr
No Liturgy Scheduled

Wednesday, March 22 - MID-LENT; Basil of Ancyra, Priest-Martyr
No Liturgy Scheduled

Thursday, March 23 - Nicon & Others, Venerable-Martyrs
No Liturgy Scheduled

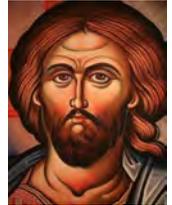
Friday, March 24 - Zachary, Venerable
7:00 PM - Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

Saturday, March 25 - Fast of the Annunciation
No Liturgy Scheduled

Sunday, March 26 - Fourth Weekend of the Great Fast - Tone 4
Parochial Celebration of the Feast of the Annunciation
10:00 AM - Special Intention

(Continued from page 5 - Called to Holiness)

humanity is a desire to hate our enemies and to respond to violence with violence. The desire to “crush” and “destroy” those we see as enemies seems to overwhelm any real spiritual growth. I think that the one action of Jesus that most modern people do not fully embrace is His *forgiveness* of those who murdered Him. This is also the reason why humans have constantly looked upon Jesus as more God than human - why people find it difficult to accept the fact that Jesus, as a full human being, forgave those who crucified Him. To many this seems to be impossible for any human being since we humans seem to refuse to forgive others who do much less to us. This tells me that humankind still does not understand that this earthly existence is given to us to help us transform/change the way that we think and behave. Ask yourself: *What is the purpose of my life?*



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LITURGY SCHEDULE

Sundays @ 10:00 AM
Ukrainian & English

Weekdays @ 8:00 AM
English

SACRAMENTS

Penance
By Appointment

Baptism & Matrimony
*In most instances membership
required for six months*

Funerals
*Membership of an immediate
family member required*

Parish Life Council

Bob & Corinne Boyko
734.451.1893

John & Janet Dicky
313.563.5509

Daria Drobny
313.791-0292

Robert Krokosky
248.431.9554

Leo & Mary LaDouceur
313.278.7378

Gordon Malaniak
734.564.9817

Leonard Mier
313.584-6795

Greg & Esther Petrovich
734.453-4354

Rafic Vawter
313.624.9867

<http://www.stmichaelarchangel.org> - and - [Facebook.com/stmichaelugccdbn](https://www.facebook.com/stmichaelugccdbn)

Gaining a Deeper Understanding of the New Testament

As I have suggested in considering Mark's Gospel, we must understand the Old Testament (OT) background that informed Mark's thinking and the thinking of the Early Church. God's Wisdom, as we can discern from the reading of Genesis, was there from the beginning and created the world and all that is in it. God's Wisdom is imagined as a maternal figure, that is life-giving, nurturing and healing, restorative and transfiguring. When Mark wanted to communicate the significance of Jesus, it was quite natural for him to present Jesus as God's Wisdom made flesh.

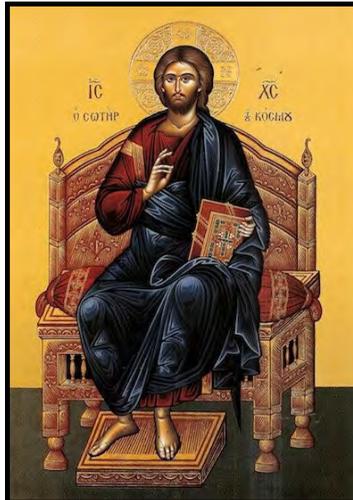
A grasp of Mark's overriding reference to Scripture (OT) should keep the reader from regarding his Gospel as an eyewitness account or as any conventional form of biography or history. It must also be remembered that at the time Mark was writing his gospel, there was still the belief by many of the Apostles that Jesus came to renew/reform Judaism. We hear in the gospels that Jesus told His apostles to go and preach to the people of Israel.

What Mark gives us is far richer. In keeping with the Jewish practices of his time, Mark interprets Jesus in the light of the Hebrew Bible. He uses Scripture as an interpretive framework.

At the same time, he shows Jesus reinterpreting the OT. Out of this two-way exchange, Mark offers us a Wisdom book.

Like other Wisdom books, Mark's Gospel derives its meaning from the Hebrew Bible. It takes place, for the most part, in the everyday settings of sea and synagogue, home and table. Its central figure, Jesus, offers wisdom in parables, riddles and short pithy sayings called aphorisms. At the same time, Mark shows Jesus to be not only a teacher of Wisdom but Wisdom itself. Jesus calls his followers to what can be called an unconventional wisdom, a way of living (and a way of dying) that he himself exemplifies.

In more modern terms, Mark's work is truly and really theological. As such, it is purposefully put together. An attentive reader cannot fail to notice Mark's craft: the repetition of certain significant words and the shaping of the narrative into symbolic events and meaningful patterns. There is a theological focus to his overall design. It must be remembered that the intent of all of the evangelists was to bring people to believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, Redeemer and Lord. Jesus is God's Promise to mankind made real. God's revelation about how to live as human beings.



Learning Our Faith From the Greek Fathers of the Church



I have been presenting Arius' ideas about Jesus and his relationship to God and, of course, Athanasius' response to Arius. Arius seemed to picture the Father and Son as bottles or decanters that are filled by each other's contents. In a similar fashion a prophet of God experienced this type of participation when filled with the Spirit. In this way Arius hoped to preserve the uniqueness of God while simultaneously elevating the "Son" to divine status, by participation rather than nature. For instance, when Jesus gently rebukes Philip for not recognizing "that I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (John 14:10), Arius understood this participation or

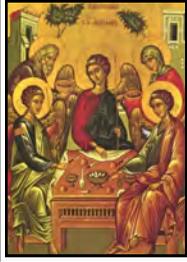
indwelling to be similar to that which other human beings have at times experienced, though Jesus experienced it to a much great extent or degree.

Athanasius would have none of this. Participation simply does not do justice to the biblical testimony concerning Christ, nor does it provide humanity with the savior it needs to be redeemed from sin. Athanasius wrote this:

I in the Father and the Father in me" does not mean (as the Arians suppose) that they are decanted into each other, being each filled from the other, as in the case of empty vessels, so that the Son fills the Father's emptiness, and the Father the Son's, each of them separately not being full and perfect. For the Father is full and perfect, and the Son is "the fullness of the godhead (Colossians 2:9). Again, God is not in the Son in the same way as he comes into the saints and thus strengthens them.

So the challenge that the Fathers of the Church faced and which someone like Arius attempted to deal with, was how Jesus could be fully God and, at the same time, fully man. This mystery is impossible for humans to comprehend. The natural tendency for humans is to believe either Jesus' divine nature was predominant or his human nature was predominant. The true belief of the Church is, however, that Jesus is truly God and, simultaneously, truly man.

The great question that the Church had to solve was: What, then, does the Son partake in his relationship with the Father? Fathers of the Church like Athanasius and Cyril struggled to find the right words and ideas to answer this question.



THE EASTERN HERALD

СХІДНИЙ ВІСНИК

The Weekly Newsletter of Very Reverend Canon Wayne J. Ruchgy, Ph.D.
Vol. 63 No 12 Third Weekend of the Great Fast March 18-19, 2017

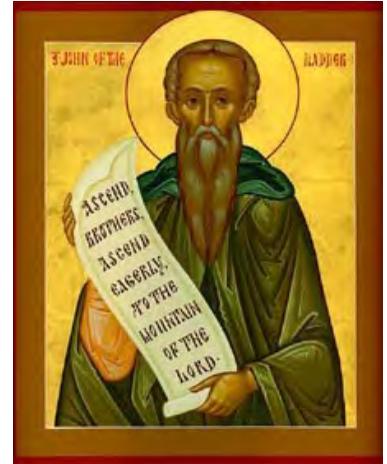
The Spirituality of the Christian East

As I begin to bring to an end this article on the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* that was written by our Father among the Saints, John Climacus, I think over all of the previous 29 steps. If you recall all of these steps, you realize that they, if they are climbed, lead to this 30th Step which deals with the virtues of faith, hope and love. The reason faith lies at the summit of the *Ladder* is, as I suggested, that it both shapes our relationship with God and, at the same time, is the fruit of that relationship.

If faith is the substance of things hoped for, then it stands to reason that faith and hope go hand in hand. Some think of hope as wishful thinking or optimism, but not as a virtue. One may hope the weather will be good tomorrow just as one may stubbornly believe it will be. But as with faith, so too hope is the foundation and the fruit of our relationship with God. Our faith is one of hope in the Resurrection, in God's mercy, in the promise of His eternal Kingdom and of union with the Holy Trinity. This is, as St. John suggests, the source of divine love. He writes this about hope:

Hope is the power behind love. Hope is what causes us to look forward to the reward of love. Hope is an abundance of hidden treasures. It is the abundant assurance of the riches in store for us. It is the doorway of love. It lifts despair and is the image of what is not yet present. When hope fails, so does love. Struggles are bound by it, labors depend on it and mercy lies all around it.

We place our hope in God because we believe that



He loves us so much that He spared nothing in order to demonstrate His great love for us.

Those who continue to grow in dispassion ever increase in hope, for *Theosis* does not have an end. The more we attain the likeness of God, the more we realize we have yet further to go, and so the greater the desire, the expectation, the hope that we will progress deeper into the infinite holiness of God.

The Power of Christ's Blood

If we wish to understand the power of Christ's blood, we should go back to the ancient account of its prefiguration in Egypt. Sacrifice a lamb without blemish, commanded Moses, and sprinkle its blood on your doors. If we were to ask him what he meant, and how the blood of an irrational beast could possibly save men endowed with reason, his answer would be that the saving power lies not in the blood itself, but in the fact that it is a sign of the Lord's blood. In those days, when the destroying angel saw the blood on the doors he did not dare to enter, so how much less will the devil approach now when he sees, not that figurative blood on the doors, but the true blood on the lips of believers, the doors of the temple of Christ.

If you desire further proof of the power of this blood, remember where it came from, how it ran down from the cross, flowing from the Master's side. The gospel records that when Christ was dead, but still hung on the cross, a soldier came and pierced His side with a lance and immediately there poured

out water and blood. Now the water was a symbol of Baptism and the blood, of the Holy Eucharist. The soldier pierced the Lord's side, he breached the wall of the sacred temple, and I have found the treasure and made it my own. So also with the lamb: the Jews sacrificed the victim and I have been saved by it.

There flowed from His side water and blood. Beloved, do not pass over this mystery without thought; it has yet another hidden meaning, which I will explain to you. I said that water and blood symbolized Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. From these two sacraments the Church is born: from Baptism, the cleansing water that gives rebirth and renewal through the Holy Spirit, and from the Holy Eucharist. Since the symbols of Baptism and the Eucharist flowed from His side, it was from His side that Christ fashioned the Church, as He had fashioned Eve from the side of Adam.

St. John Chrysostom

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