

## *Great Wednesday*

On Wednesday night the Lord passed into Bethany (Mt. 26:6-17). Here while He was in the house of Simon the leper and the high priests, scribes and elders in assembly already decided to seize Jesus Christ by trickery and to kill Him, a certain "sinful" woman\_) poured precious myrrh on the head of the Savior and in this way prepared Him for burial as He Himself judged her action\_). Here at the same time, as opposed to the disinterested action of the sinful woman, the criminal intention to betray his Teacher and Lord to the lawless assembly was born in ungrateful soul of Judas, one of twelve disciples of the Savior. Therefore in the church services of Great Wednesday the sinful woman is glorified and the love of money and betrayal of Judas is censured and cursed. "As the sinful woman", the Holy Church sings this day, "was bringing her offering of myrrh, the disciple was scheming with lawless men. She rejoiced in pouring out her precious myrrh. He hastened to sell the Priceless One. She recognized the Master, but He departed from the Master. She was set free, but Judas was enslaved to the enemy"; "O the impieties of Judas! O God, deliver our souls from this" \_).

*Troparion*, see Great Monday.

*Kontakion, tone 4*

**Though I have transgressed more than the harlot, O Good One,  
I have not offered Thee a flood of tears,  
But praying in silence I fall down before Thee.  
With love I embrace Thy most pure feet.  
As Master, grant me remission of debts.  
When I cry to Thee, O Savior:  
Deliver me from the filth of my deeds.**

**Matins Gospel:** Jn. 12:19-50; sel. 42-43. **Paramoea:** 1) Ezek. 2:3-10, 3:1-3. 2) Exod. 2:11-22. 3) Job 2:1-10. **Gospel:** Mt. 26:8-16; sel. 108.

Great Wednesday is the last day of lent and repentance, and with it the order of the Great Lenten services comes to an end. This also is expressed in some **of the features of the church services** of Great Wednesday namely: at the dismissal of Hours the prayer "O Master, great in mercy" which is normally read in Great Compline is read over the people who have bowed to the to the ground 4); at the Presanctified liturgy the great prostrations is done after "Blessed be the Name of the Lord" for the last time, "and if the prostrations are completed in practice in the church, they will continue to be done in the cells even up to Great Friday", i.e. the great prostrations, but not the small, is dropped in church, as is evident, for example, in the Order of Compline where it is said: "let us do three prostrations, all equally slowly". On Great Wednesday also is ended the reading of Great Compline and the reading of the Kathisma in Matins, the Hours and Vespers. "From this point on the saint of the day is not sung in the church during **the Midnight Office** until Thomas week. In the cathedral temples also the laity sings in the churches".

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\_) In the Gospel narratives three women who were worthy to anoint Jesus Christ with myrrh on three different evenings are differentiated. Mentioned by Evangelist Luke (7:36-50) the sinful woman who anointed the Savior with myrrh in the evening in Jerusalem in the house of Simon the Pharisee, was, according to tradition, Mary Magdalene, "out of whom had come seven demons" (Lk. 8:2). Another woman who anointed the Savior with myrrh in the evening, who was in Bethany six days before Pascha, was Mary, the sister of Lazarus (Jn. 12:1-11). The third evening also was in Bethany, but was two days before Pascha, in the house of Simon the leper, and on it a certain woman who is distinct from the first two, was worthy to anoint the Savior with myrrh (Mt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:1-9). According to the Commentary of St. John Chrysostom, the Evangelist Matthew in the narration about the evening in the house of Simon the leper "not without purpose did mention the leprosy of Simon, but in order that He might show the reason why the woman dared to approach Jesus. Since leprosy seemed an impure and abominable illness, and yet she saw Jesus both healed the man and cleansed his leprosy, otherwise He would not have chosen to stay at the leper's house, that she hoped that Jesus would also easily cleanse the impurity of her soul" (Refer to the Synaxarion for Great Wednesday).

\_) In ordinary life, especially among rich people, anointing with myrrh was very common in the East, partly because it was needed because of the attributes of the hot climate, and partly it was pleasant and convenient in life. They were especially anointed during festivals, during the presentation of dignitaries, or when at their home they received especially close friends. They ordinarily anointed the hair on the head, the forehead, the face, the beard and when they wanted to express special respect to some person also the legs. Above all, the Hebrews had the custom to rub the dead with aromatic balms.

\_) "It was fulfilled", teaches St. John Chrysostom, "what Christ declared beforehand about the sinful woman. Wheresoever you go in the world, you will hear everywhere what this woman has done; although she is not well-known and had not many witnesses. Who then proclaimed it, and caused it to be spread about? It was the power of Him Who is speaking these words. And so great a time has passed, and yet the memory of this incident did not fade away, but Persians and Indians, Scythians and Thracians, and Sarmatians, and the race of Moors, and the inhabitants of the British Isles alike spread abroad what was done secretly in a house by a sinful woman". "How did Judas become the betrayer, you may ask, having been called by Christ? Because the call from God is not compulsory, neither does it force the will of them who do not wish to choose virtue, but admonishes, and advises, and does and manages all things in order to persuade them to become good; but if some people do not wish to be good, He does not compel them".

4) In the Moscow Dormition Cathedral in the 17th century at the Dismissal of the Hours the special "Forgiveness Rite" was performed when the Sovereign came into the cathedral. This Rite was the same as that done on Forgiveness Sunday before the Holy Forty Day Fast. The rite of forgiveness is done on this day since that time in our monasteries (Perm Eparchialjnia Vedomosti (Perm Diocesan Messenger) 1889, 7).

*S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp 536-7  
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