

SYNAXARIA OF THE TRIODION

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GREAT MONDAY

On Holy and Great Monday, we commemorate the blessed Joseph the All-Comely and the fig tree cursed and withered by the Lord.

Verses to Joseph the All-Comely

The chaste Joseph proved to be a just ruler
And a provider of corn; O abundance of good things.

Verses to the withered fig tree

Christ likeneth the synagogue of the Hebrews
To a fig tree devoid of spiritual fruits and
Withereth it with a curse; let us avoid its fate.

Synaxarion

On this day the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ begins; and first of all, Joseph the All-Comely is interpreted as a type of Christ.

Joseph was the eleventh son of the Patriarch Jacob, born to him of Rachel. Envied by his brothers on account of certain dreams that he had, he was first cast into a pit. Jacob was deceived by his other sons into believing, on the basis of a bloodstained robe, that Joseph had been devoured by a wild beast. Joseph was then sold to some Ishmaelite travellers for thirty pieces of silver. The Ishmaelites in turn sold him to Potiphar, the chief eunuch of Pharaoh, the King of Egypt.

When Potiphar's wife conceived a mad desire for the young man's chaste comeliness, he, not wishing to commit the iniquitous act that she proposed, left his clothing behind and fled. She slandered Joseph to her husband, who had him fettered and imprisoned. Joseph was later set free after explaining certain of Pharaoh's dreams. On being presented to the king, he was appointed Lord of all Egypt. While providing his brothers with corn during a great famine, he once again made himself known to them. After living the whole of his life in virtue, he reposed in Egypt, being highly esteemed for his chastity, in addition to his other virtues.

Joseph the All-Comely is an icon of Christ, since Christ, too, was envied by the Jews, His own people, was sold by one of His Disciples for thirty pieces of silver, and was enclosed in the dark and gloomy pit of the tomb. Breaking forth thence by His sovereign will, He reigns over Egypt—that is, He is victorious over all sin by His Divine power—and rules over the entire world. In His love for mankind, He redeems us through the mystical provision of corn, in that He offers Himself as a sacrifice for our sake, nourishing us with the heavenly Bread of His life-giving Flesh. Such is the proper interpretation of Joseph the All-Comely.

On this day, we also commemorate the fig tree that was withered. For the Divine Evangelists, namely Saints Matthew and Mark, after the narrative concerning the Palms, add the following story. According to Saint Mark: “And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: and seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever” (St. Mark 11:12-14). According to Saint Matthew: “In the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away” (St. Matthew 21:18-19). Now, the fig tree is the Synagogue of the Jews, on which the Savior did not find the appropriate fruit, but only the darkness of the Law. Taking even this away from it, He rendered it completely fallow.

If one were to ask why the inanimate tree became dry when it received the curse, not having sinned in any way, let him learn that the Jews, seeing Christ always doing good to all men and not causing anyone even the slightest distress, supposed that He had the power only to do good, and not to chastise. In His love for mankind, the Master did not wish to show that He had the ability to act thus towards any man. Therefore, in order to convince the ungrateful people that He had sufficient power to chastise, but in His goodness did not wish to chastise them, He inflicted a punishment on inanimate and insentient nature.

There is, at the same time, an apocryphal account that has come down to us from wise Elders, as Saint Isidore of Pelousion says: that the tree which caused the transgression of Adam and Eve was this fig tree, the leaves whereof the transgressors used to cover themselves. Hence, since it had not suffered this fate originally, it was withered by Christ in His love for mankind, lest it any longer bear fruit that would be the cause of sin.

That sin is likened to the fig tree is quite clear; for the fig has the sweetness of pleasure, but the adhesiveness of sin, and it subsequently stings the conscience by its harshness. The Fathers placed the story of the fig tree here in order to arouse us to compunction, and the commemoration of Joseph because he is a type of Christ. The fig tree is every soul that is devoid of all spiritual fruit. The Lord, not finding any refreshment on it in the morning,

that is, during the present life, withers it through a curse and consigns it to the eternal fire. It stands as a withered reminder, inspiring fear in those who do not bring forth the appropriate fruit of virtue.

By the intercessions of Joseph the All-Comely, O Christ God, have mercy on us. Amen.

