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Introduction

Joy in the Lord

The period of the Fifty Holy Days is a special period in the ecclesiastical cycle. The prominent feature of this period is joy. The Church prays with a festal tune in all Her liturgies and prayers, including the funerals. During this period, the Church lives the life of happiness, which was experienced by the holy disciples after Christ's resurrection and His appearance to them. The Divine inspiration describes this joy as such, "Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." (John 20:20) The Lord's presence with the disciples led them to experience joy, which lasted with them for the rest of their lives. In the beginning, they saw the Lord with their eyes and touched Him, and they were happy. He continued to appear to them for forty days speaking to them about things pertaining to the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3), until the time came for Him to leave them and ascend to heaven. However, after the forty days when Christ ceased to appear to them, the disciples' happiness did not end. In fact, this joy stayed with them because they continued to see Christ, but in a different way. At first, they saw Him with their physical eyes. Afterwards, they saw Him with the eyes of faith, which don't need the physical evidence of His presence.

Christ promised His disciples before His ascension that He will remain with them for all days; He said, "I am with you always even to the end of the age." (Matt 28: 20) The disciples realized that His presence does not have to be a physical one similar to the times before the crucifixion and during the forty days. Therefore, they did not feel that Christ's ascension meant an end to His presence with them and an end to their joy. On the contrary, their happiness continued after Christ's ascension. Saint Luke mentioned in his gospel the following, "And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy." (Luke 24:50-52) Our Church teaches us how to be happy in the Lord.

Since our true joy is in God's presence with us, during the Fifty Holy Days we learn to be happy because of Christ's presence amongst us, as well as our presence with Him.

Questions – (Read First: John 15:26-16:15)

1. What promise is repeated in v26, and where else have we read of this promise? _____

2. How would disciples be treated, and what would the people who so acted think about it? _____

3. How would the disciples be affected by what He was telling them (v4-6)? _____

4. How would it benefit the disciples for Jesus to leave? _____

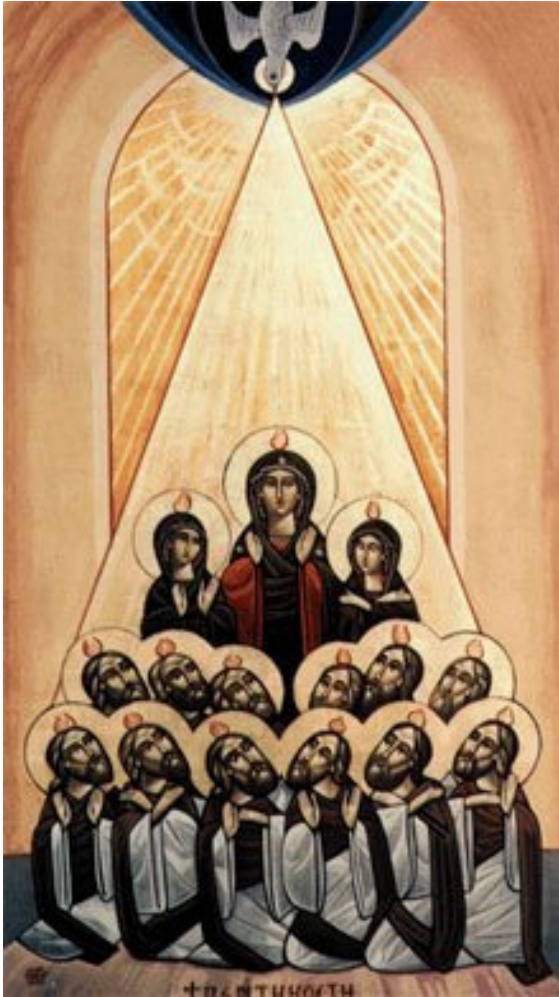
5. What would the Comforter do for the world, and in what three areas would He do so? _____

6. What would the Spirit do for the apostles? _____

7. What would the Spirit do for Jesus (v14)? _____

8. What belonged to Jesus (v15), and what does this prove about His nature? _____

Week 7 - The Feast of Pentecost



Seventh Sunday is the Feast of Pentecost (**John 15:26-16:15**). Christ sends us the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, "It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." (John 16:7)

Through Her liturgical services during the Fifty Days, our Church teaches us that happiness is in God's presence. Consequently, we pray with the festal tune and praise God saying, "Christ is Risen" (Ikhristos Anecti). The Resurrection Procession during the Diving Liturgy allows us to feel the true happiness based on Christ's presence in our midst. Even spiritual matters such as prostrations (metanoias) and fasting, which don't agree with the festal rites, are halted during the Fifty Days since the friends of the bridegroom cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them (Mark 2: 19-20).

We must share our joy with others

During the Fifty Holy Days, we become acquainted with our Heavenly Bridegroom and discover the power of His divinity, His abundant mercy, His promise to us for eternal life, and sitting with Him in the heavenly places. As we reflect on His loving actions towards us, we become happy, and no one can take away our joy.

This period teaches us that our joy in our Heavenly Bridegroom increases when we invite others to share with us this joy. Those who saw the Resurrected Christ, e.g. Saint Mary Magdalene, the Marys, the disciples at Emmaus, the disciples, and the others who witnessed the Resurrection all went and told others. After our Lord Jesus Christ revealed to His disciples the mysteries of the life of joy, He asked them to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1: 8)

The everlasting joy in the Lord

Our experience of joy due to God's presence in our midst should not be limited to the Fifty Holy Days, but should extend to all the days of our life. The disciples were happy when they saw the Lord, but their joy continued after the Ascension, and they exhorted us to be happy in the Lord all the time. Saint Paul experienced the joy of being with the Lord and invited us to rejoice in the Lord always saying, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice." (Philippians 4:4)

Spiritual practices to express the joy of being in God’s presence

We should train ourselves during the Fifty Holy Days to rejoice in the Lord. The following are some spiritual exercises to help us achieve that:

When we partake of the Eucharist, we are receiving Christ within us. Thus Christ is with us and we are with Him. Our Lord said, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in Him." (John 6:56). Partaking the Body and Blood of Christ allows us to receive Christ inside us, thus leading us to rejoice in the Lord; no one can take away our happiness. Therefore, during communion, we praise the Lord by chanting Psalm 150. The Divine Liturgy is the celebration of our Lord’s death and resurrection. We meet the Lord like the disciples who met Him after the Resurrection, and we rejoice in Christ, Who is within us.

One of the beautiful spiritual practices during the Fifty Holy Days is to partake of the Eucharist often, especially during the early morning Liturgies, the time of Christ’s resurrection. We will then experience the joy of those who witnessed the Resurrection of the Lord.

Some pay a great deal of attention to partaking of the Eucharist during Lent, and then see the Fifty Holy Days as a time to lax spiritually. Therefore, they don’t pay much attention to attending the Divine Liturgy and receiving communion. However, this is a beautiful period to experience the joy of receiving the Lord in Holy Communion. Partaking of the Divine Mysteries transforms for us the joy, which the disciples experienced after Christ’s resurrection, from a historical event to an actual event, which we can experience along with them.

When we are happy, it is appropriate to praise God by chanting. Saint James the Apostle said, "Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms." (James 5:13) We should take great interest in praising God and chanting during the Fifty Days by participating in the praises of the Church. Also, we should add to our personal prayers parts of the psalmody, e.g. the Doxology of the Resurrection, and memorize some of the hymns. This way we teach ourselves to express our joy in the Lord by praises and hymns.

Questions – (Read First: John 16:23-33)

1. What promise is repeated in v23,24? Where else is this promised? _____

2. What benefit would the apostles receive from this promise? _____

3. How did Jesus describe the teaching He had given them, and what change would occur (v25,26)? _____

4. Why did the Father love the disciples? _____

5. Where had Jesus come from and where would He go? _____

6. What claims did they make for Jesus in v30? _____

7. What did Jesus predict would happen to them (v32)? _____

8. Why would Jesus not be alone? _____

9. What will we have in the world and what will we have in the Lord Jesus Christ? _____

Week 6 - The Source of our Peace

I have said this to you, that in me you may have **peace.**

In the world you have tribulation;
but be of good cheer,

I have overcome the world.
John 16:33



Sixth Sunday (**John 16:23-33**) presents Christ as the source of our peace. Our Lord Jesus Christ is our peace and the source of our victory in conquering the world and its troubles. In the Gospel of the sixth Sunday, our Heavenly Bridegroom forewarns of tribulations, "Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone...These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:32-33)

We rejoice in the Lord and our joy increases as we know Him more and experience Him with more depth. Therefore, one of the beneficial exercises during the Fifty Days is to concentrate our readings on the Person of Christ. We should read books, which address His divinity, His qualities, and His love for us. Thus we come out of this period with deeper knowledge about the Person of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ.

Our joy in the Lord should not be limited to us only. One of the beneficial exercises also is to let others know about the Risen Christ, so they can share with us our joy in the Lord. May the Lord help us, by His presence amongst us, to experience the life of joy and always live happily with our living Christ, Who loved us and gave Himself up for us.

The Fifty Holy Days have the following weeks

The Church's readings during the Fifty Holy Days revolve around the theme of our Heavenly Bridegroom, Who is present in our midst. Thus the readings of the Sundays of the Fifty Days present to us different aspects of our Heavenly Bridegroom.

Week 0: The Feast of Resurrection

Week 1: Confirming Resurrection (Thomas Sunday)

Week 2: The Bread of Life

Week 3: The Living Water Samaritan Woman)

Week 4: The Light of the World

Week 5: The Way, the Truth, and Life

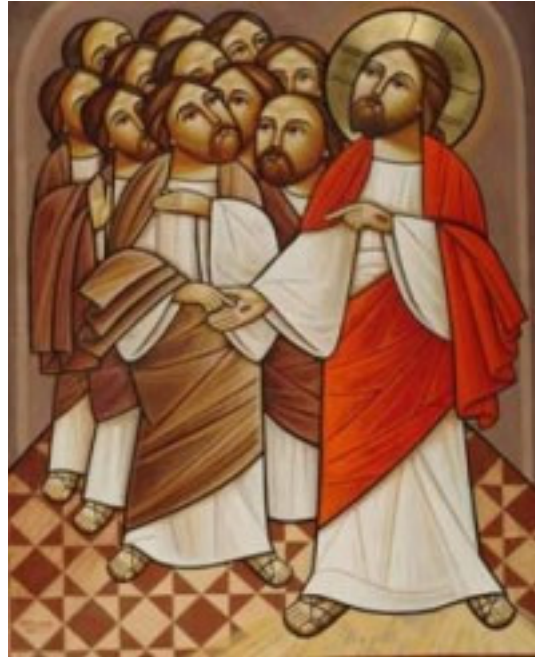
Week 6: The Source of our Peace

Week 7: The Feast of Pentecost

This joyful journey has certain landmarks and it is through our liturgical worship during this period that our Holy Church presents to us these landmarks. Together, we shall see how this journey allows us to experience joy, using the gospel reading of the Sunday Divine Liturgies as a guide for the important landmarks of this journey. As we hear and live through the prayers, hymns, and readings of the Holy Church, may our Lord help us to enjoy the journey of the Fifty Holy Days!

Week 1 - Confirming Resurrection (Thomas Sunday)

First Sunday, also known as Thomas Sunday (**John 20:19-31**). The Church presents to us the Resurrected Christ as the source of our joy, as it is written, "Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." (John 20:20) The gospel confirms the reality of the Resurrection, since it is written that Christ, "showed them His hands and His side." (John 20:20) On the following Sunday after the Resurrection when Christ appeared to them again, He said to Thomas, who wanted a physical proof of the Resurrection, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands, and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." (John 20:27) Then Christ blessed all those who believe without seeing, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29) The reading of the first Sunday confirms the reality of the Resurrection and gives importance to the belief in the Resurrection of Christ, while experiencing continuous joy, because our Christ is a Living Christ.



The first Sunday, Thomas Sunday, affirms the resurrection of the Bridegroom, His victory over death by shattering the power of sin, and releasing the Church (the Bride) from bondage to sin. As the Bride, who is the Church or the human soul, gets acquainted with her Bridegroom, she sees in Him the following:

- the Bread of Life (week 2)
- the Giver of the Living Water (week 3)
- the Light of the World (week 4)
- the Way, the Truth, and the Life (week 5)
- our Peace and the Source of our Victory (week 6)

Questions – (Read First: John 14:1-11)

1. In whom should we have faith, and what can faith do for our troubles? _____

2. Where was Jesus going and why? _____

3. What question did Thomas ask Jesus (v5)? _____

4. Define each term Jesus used for Himself in v6:
 - a. Way: _____

 - b. Truth: _____

 - c. Life: _____

5. What did Jesus say we can know through Him (v7)? _____

6. What request did Philip make? _____

7. How can we know the Father through Jesus? _____

Week 5 - The Way, the Truth, and Life



Fifth Sunday (**John 14:1-11**) presents Christ as the Way, the Truth, and Life. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Through Christ we see the truth and know the way to God and eternal life. In the Gospel of the fifth Sunday, our Heavenly Bridegroom says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Fr. except through Me." (John 14:6)

Questions – (Read First: John 20:19-31)

1. What happened that evening? (Think: What day of the week was it still?) _____

2. What did Jesus show them, and what was the significance of this? _____

3. How did the disciples feel when they saw Jesus, and what commission did He give them (v20,21)? (Think: Put yourself in the disciples' place. How would these appearances affect you?) _____

4. In v22 what did Jesus say the apostles would receive and what could they do as a result? _____

5. Who was not present when Jesus first appeared to the apostles? What did he say? _____

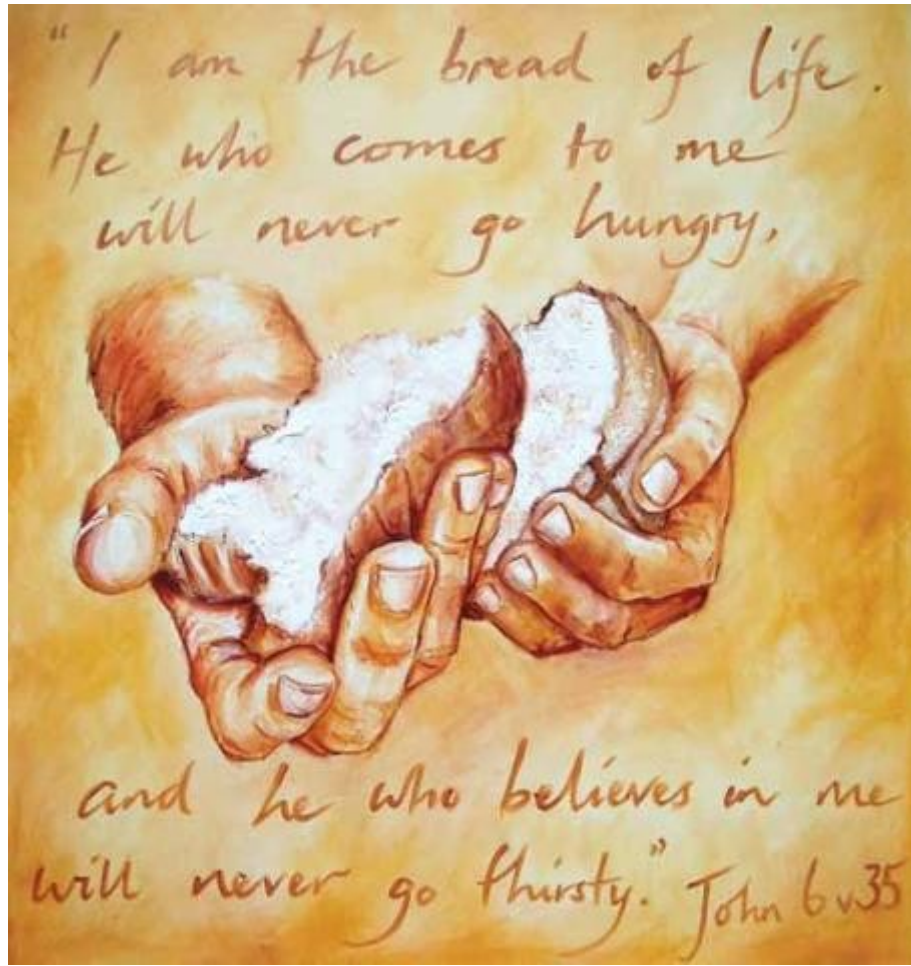
6. When and how did Jesus appear next? (Think: What day of the week would that be?) _____

7. What did He tell Thomas to do? (Think: What does this show about Jesus' crucifixion?) _____

8. How did Thomas respond to Jesus? (Think: What does this mean about Jesus' nature?) _____

9. What did Jesus say about other people believing as Thomas did? _____

Week 2 - The Bread of Life



Second Sunday (**John 6:35-45**) presents to us Christ as the Bread of Life, which came down from heaven. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life, Who nourishes us. The Heavenly Bridegroom said, "He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst." (John 6:35)

Questions - (Read First: John 12:35-50)

1. What Scripture did John quote that was fulfilled by the people's attitude toward Jesus (vv 37,38)? What reason is given why they should have believed in Him? _____

2. According to John, what did Isaiah see and who was he speaking about when he made this prediction? _____

3. According to the context in Isaiah, whose glory did Isaiah see? What does this tell you about who Jesus is? _____

4. How did some Pharisees react to Jesus and why (v42,43)? _____

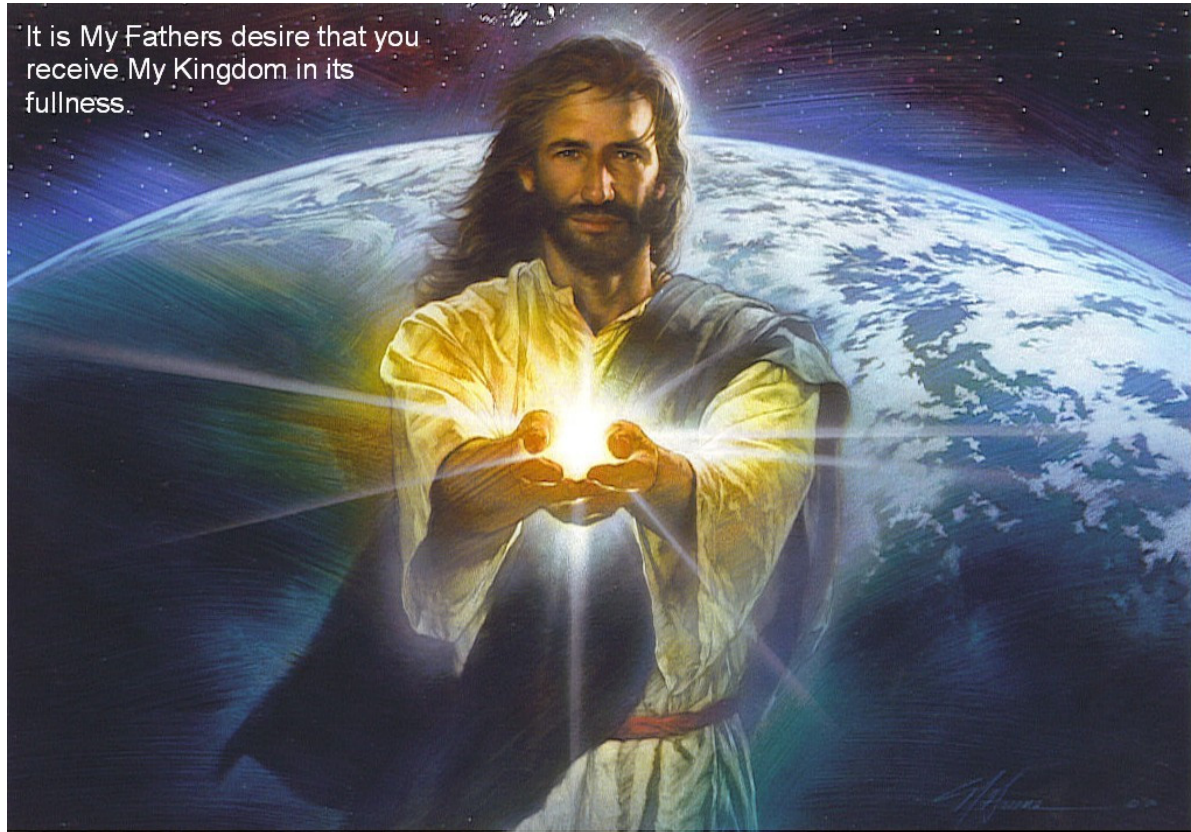
5. What can we learn about the danger of seeking praises from men? _____

6. What is the relationship between faith in Jesus and faith in the Father (v44,45)? _____

7. What will be the standard of judgment on the last day? What lessons should we learn? _____

8. What was the source of Jesus' teaching and why is this important (v49,50)? _____

Week 4 - The Light of the World



Fourth Sunday (**John 12:35-50**) talks about Christ as the Light of the World. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Light of the world, Who lights our lives. In the Gospel reading of the fourth Sunday, our Heavenly Bridegroom says, "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness." (John 12:46)

Questions – (Read First: John 6:35-45)

1. Give verses that prove believing in the Lord Jesus Christ leads to everlasting life.

2. What verse testifies to the importance of the Holy Communion? _____
3. What is the "bread of life," and how do we partake of it? _____
4. What is the benefit of partaking of this bread? _____
5. Where did Jesus come from, and for what purpose did He come (v38)? _____
6. What was the Father's will for Jesus, and what was His will for those who believe in Him (v39,40)? _____
7. What complaint did the people raise against Jesus (v41,42)? _____
8. Based on what we have learned, what mistake did the people make that led them to make this complaint? _____
9. What must happen in order for a person to come to Jesus (v44,45)? _____

Week 3 - The Living Water (Samaritan Woman)



Third Sunday (**John 4:1-42**) talks about the meeting of Christ with the Samaritan Woman, and the Church presents Christ to us as the Living Water. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the giver of the living water and whoever drinks of Him will never thirst. During the Gospel reading of the third Sunday, Christ presents to us, along with the Samaritan Woman, the living water. He told her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me to drink', you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." (John 4:10) When she inquired about the ability of Christ to give her living water, the Lord revealed to her the power of the living water in the person, who drinks of it, by saying, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:13-15)

Questions – (Read First: John 4:1-42)

1. What time was it, how did Jesus feel, and what did He do? _____

2. What offer did Jesus make to the woman (v10)? _____

3. What results would come from drinking this water (v13,14)? (Think: What was the living water that Jesus offered?) _____

4. How does God want us to worship Him, and how does this relate to His own character (v23,24)? _____

5. What did the woman say to the people of the city, and what did the people do as a result (v28-30)? _____

6. What happened as a result of the Samaritan woman's words? _____

7. What did the Samaritans want Jesus to do, and what did He do? _____

8. Who did they believe Jesus was, and what convinced them? _____
