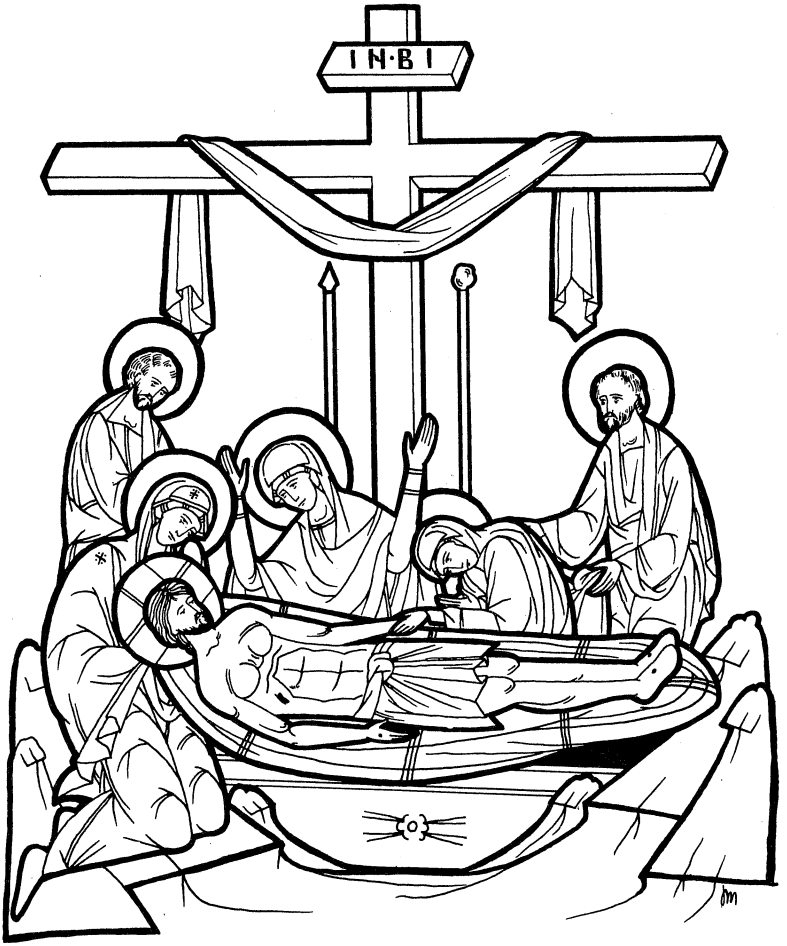

"Today a tomb holds Him Who holds the creation in the hollow of His hand; a stone covers Him Who covered the heaven with glory. Life sleeps and Hades trembles, and Adam is set free from his bonds. Glory to Your dispensation, whereby You have accomplished all things, granting us an eternal Sabbath, Your most holy Resurrection from the dead."

Jerusalem Matins for Great Saturday

Great Saturday

Father Robert J. Karl

"All you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia!"

Galatians 3:27

Great Saturday is our annual return to our own baptism experience. It is the day that connects Great Friday with the Radiant Resurrection. We see too well the gap between the sorrow of Great Friday and the joy of the Pasch. The sorrow simply cannot be replaced by the joy. Rather, the sorrow is slowly transformed into joy—the victory grows from the defeat. The sorrow is aptly displayed in this morning's Jerusalem Matins, while the joy comes slowly in Saint Basil's Baptismal Divine Liturgy. The darkness of Death gives way to the radiance of Life, just as the vestments are changed from black to white at this Divine Liturgy. Jesus, in His obedience to His Father, is the very foundation and beginning of victory and new life.

This was the "hour" of Christ: "For this I have come." The whole life of Jesus is in God, and so too every human life ought to be full of God. Through our baptism and chrismation, the victorious Christ overcomes Death and its power within us; the sorrow becomes joy; the time of new life and new creation has begun. The Mysteries of Christian initiation witness the beginning of His resurrection in us, but not as yet our own resurrection. Each and every one of us will have to die to the world of darkness and death, and in our baptism we are baptized into Christ and into His death, and thus we can partake with Christ in His New Life—the life of the Father, preparing ourselves for the day without darkness in His kingdom.

When we totally and unconditionally give up the self-sufficiency of our life and put all its meaning in Christ, only then can we taste of the newness of life—an experience that presents to us a new world, a whole new vision and light, the very kingdom of God. Baptism is therefore the death of our selfishness and self-sufficiency just as Christ's death was the unconditional self-surrender to the will of the Father.

These sentiments are vividly portrayed in today's Paschal Vigil Divine Liturgy. Resurrection Eve in our Byzantine Catholic Church is the celebrating of this transformation and sharing in the New Life. We celebrate the mystery of baptism as an integral part of our celebrating the Paschal Feast. This Baptismal Vigil Divine Liturgy epitomizes the joy of all those who were "baptized into Christ and who have put on Christ" and who were "buried with Him by baptism into death by the glory of the Father."

Our baptism was the starting point and foundation of our Christian life. All this we contemplate and renew on Great Saturday.

SCRIPTURE READINGS: Romans 6:3-11
Exodus 12:1-11, 13:20 - 14:22
Daniel 3:1-51