
PENANCE AND TRANSFORMATION

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE PASCHAL CYCLE IN THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX TRADITION

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Abstract

The aim of this presentation is to analyze the symbolic meaning of time within one of the most important cycles in Romanian calendar called the paschal cycle. The cycle bears profound theological and archaic senses within Romanian religiosity, combining the nationwide, universal message of the Orthodox Church with its local variations. The most important message of the paschal cycle is for man to undergo a process of reformation and atonement. The symbol of this time had been attributed to *metanoia*, which indicates the transformation of man's approach to life. It is additionally emphasized by the names of Sundays within this period and Gospel readings as well as church rituals observed at that time.

Keywords: sacred time, Byzantine tradition, symbolism, hermeneutics

1. Introduction

The Passover (*Paștele*), i.e. The Resurrection of Christ (*Învieerea Domnului*) is the central feast in the annual cycle of the Orthodox Church. It is a moveable holiday befalling on the first Sunday after the first full moon in spring (spring equinox). The First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD established that the Church's observance of Easter can fall at the earliest on 22nd of March and the latest on the 23rd of April/8 of May. The Passover is the oldest, and at the same time the most joyous and festive holiday at the Christian Church. It has originated in the Jewish Pesach (Hebrew פֶּסַח *Pesach* – 'The Passover') celebrated as the commemoration of Jehovah's passing over Israelite first born sons and deliverance from the yoke of Egypt [1, 2]. The Orthodox Church observes the holiday to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ that took place on Sunday, the first day of the week after the end of Sabbath according to the Gospel and testimonies of the first Christians. In accordance with the historical sources, on the Romanian lands the Passover started being celebrated (the Romanian-Slavic chronicles, liturgical books, Orthodox art) in circa 15th century. Descriptions of detailed

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celebrations on the courts of Moldavian and Wallachian Hospodars along with the time of preparation before the actual festivities is documented from approx. mid-17th century in chronicles as well as testimonies of foreigners travelling across the country – with a slight difference marking the church and folk traditions [3; 4; L. Zamani, *Cum se sărbătorește Paștele la Curțile domnitorilor români*, http://historia.ro/exclusiv_web/general/articol/cum-se-sarbatoreste-pastele-curtile-domnitorilor-romani, accessed 24.10.2013].

The paschal cycle is divided into two parts. The first involves the preparation time representing the antinomy of light and darkness, which symbolizes the sinfulness of man and the world. The time devoted for the preparation period comprises of approximately ten weeks: three weeks preceding the holiday (22 days), six weeks of Lent (40 days), Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday (2 days) and the Holy Week (6 days). Altogether it is a period of 70 days. The structure of this cycle carries a significant theological message to believers. To become resurrected by God they must undertake the heroic *metanoi* or transform the conduct of life. The term *metanoi* is, the symbol marking the entire period; it is a figurative calling to the human son – Adam and each of his descendants – to leave the domain of sin in both, spiritual and physical aspects and join the story of salvation [5-7]. The Orthodox Church exegesis of this time bears clear eschatological features – it preaches that the revival to spiritual life and resurrection from the world of darkness and sin to the world of the light can only happen through repenting and transforming your life. The renewal of the relation to God is then not possible without the renewal of inter-human relations. Only relationships based on the truth and forgiveness guarantee coming closer to God and participating in the light of the Tabor [6, 7].

2. Pre-Lent period - repentance and forgiveness

Therefore even before the onset of Great Lent, the Orthodox Romanians prepare themselves for the event during the so-called pre-Lent period over three weeks. From this time until the end of the Holy Week they are presented with important paradigms of behaviour through biblical allegories. These are to remind them about repentance, which is very characteristic of Orthodox spirituality. The dominating motifs of this time are: reformation, humility, return and forgiveness. This includes four Sundays bearing names after Gospel accounts read every week at the Church.

The first Sunday is known as Zacchaeus Sunday (*Duminica lui Zahau*). The name Zacchaeus was first mentioned in the Gospel account of Saint Luke, which speaks about Zacchaeus, a wealthy Roman tax-collector living an opulent and sinful life, who, having heard of Jesus' arrival at Jericho, wished to see him with his own eyes. The encounter resulted to be the beginning of his repentance and restitution. Through the example of this man, the Orthodox Church symbolically portrays God continuously seeking man, irrespectively of the sins he has committed, welcoming all those who wish to find him.

The second Sunday bears the name of the Publican and the Pharisee (*Duminica Vameşului și a fariseului*) and refers to Saint Luke's Gospel's parable (18.10-14) that mentions two lifestyles: one of pride and the other of humility. The parable is read as a reminder to forgive and love the other, the absence of which makes all the other good deeds unimportant. The struggle of transformation must also take place in the mind and heart of the sinner, who repeats words uttered by the tax-collector: "God, be merciful to me, the sinner," adapted as a tradition of Jesus parables, so significant in the spiritual tradition of the Orthodox Church [6]. The awareness of 'being exiled' and growing apart from God is also symbolically present in the lyrics of Psalm 137/136 chanted at the morning prayer of that day: "By the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept...", which is also called the psalm of exile. It is a passionate testimony to the condition of man captivated by sin and remaining away from *the sacrum* [*Triodion, czyli Trójpieśniec z Bogiem Świętym, zawierający odpowiadające jemu obrzędy*, <http://www.liturgia.cerkiew.pl/pages/File/docs/triod-02-przedposcie%5B2%5D.pdf>, accessed 29.09.2013]. From that Sunday on, the Church also starts the readings of the Lenten Triodion, which will last for another 70 days [M. Giosanu, *Istoria unei cărți de cult cu multiple valențe poetice: Triodul*, <http://www.cntdr.ro/sites/default/files/c2010/c2010a49.pdf>, accessed 23.11.2013].

The third Sunday is called the Prodigal Son Sunday (*Duminica Fiului Risipitor*). It owes its name to the parable of the Prodigal Son, which is that day read in the Church. The son returns from 'the spiritual abandonment' to the house of the Father (Luke 15.11-32) [<http://www.liturgia.cerkiew.pl/pages/File/docs/triod-02-przedposcie%5B2%5D.pdf>, accessed 29.09.2012]. Once again it reminds the believers to transform their lives by truly repenting their sins and about the love of God addressed to all those returning to him. It cannot, however, be one-sided love – thus it presents the symbolic manifestation of synergy that occurs between a Christian and God, who gives him his hand and consequently his power [5, p. 67-68].

The fourth Sunday bears two names. The first of them is Sunday of the Last Judgment (*Duminica Înfricoșatei Judecări*), which refers to the account from Saint Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 25.31–46) and reminds about the Second Coming of Christ, who is to perform the last judgment of humanity [<http://www.crestinortodox.ro/sarbatori/duminica-infricosatei-judecati/duminica-infricosatoarei-judecati-128831.html>, accessed 14.02.2014]. The liturgy read that day mentions horrid Last Judgment images, Christ sitting in the valley of Josaphat, on the throne of glory, accompanied by the sound of trumpets and flames coming from the river of fire and the graves open with the souls of sinners arriving with "horrible weeping and gnashing of teeth" [<http://www.liturgia.cerkiew.pl/pages/File/docs/triod-02-przedposcie%5B2%5D.pdf>]. In the hymns and prayers of this day the mercy of God is also cited as given to everyone who will repent and turn away from the sin of this world. Another name used for the fourth Sunday is the Meat-fare Sunday (*Duminica lăsatului de sec la carne*). In the Orthodox Church practice it is the last Sunday

before Easter during which believers are allowed to consume meat. This Sunday introduces the period of Great Lent, which is to start in a week's time. The sacrifices of Great Lent are not only meant to train one's body in resisting temptation, but above all to strengthen the spiritual aspect of the human being.

The fifth Sunday, completing the preparatory period preceding Lent is called the Sunday of Adam's expulsion from Paradise (*Duminica Izgonirii lui Adam din Rai*). The Church reminisces about the time God ordered first people in Paradise to fast (ban on eating fruit from trees), which they did not observe and thus brought sin and death to the world (Genesis 2.17). It is also a day of forgiveness at the Church, therefore this Sunday is frequently called the Sunday of Forgiveness (*Duminica Iertării*) (Matthew 6.14–15). In Romania there is a special ritual taking place at the end of Sunday Vespers and thus it is called the Vespers of Forgiveness (*Vecernia Iertării*) or the Vespers of Mercy (*Vecernia Umilința*). The officiating minister wearing an epitrachil and holding a cross in his hands comes out to the worshippers and asks for forgiveness of the sins. Then the believers approach the cross held by the priest, ask for forgiveness of their sins and kiss the cross. Next, they approach one another, apologize and give one another a kiss of peace to symbolize the act of forgiveness. The Orthodox Church uses this rite to make the believers realize that without forgiveness they cannot follow the main path set by Jesus – the principal value of Christianity – love thy neighbour (Matthew 5.44, 7.3–5, 18.21–22) [M. Schifti, *Iertarea în lumina învăturii creștine*, <http://www.crestinortodox.ro/morala/iertarea-lumina-invaturii-crestine-70853.html>, accessed 2.02.2014].

The symbolism of the ritual is additionally reinforced by the vestments worn by the clergy – despite the fact that it is the Pre-Lenten period and the vestments worn at this time are generally black, this one prayer is celebrated in white vestments to symbolize the light of the new life in the plan of salvation. In this ritual they are the symbol of transformation and the future resurrection to new life. The rite is accompanied by singing of the Canon of Pascha by Saint John of Damascus. From this day on the human body is to be treated in even more rigorous way and it is the last day believers can consume dairy before the onset of Great Lent, thus the Sunday is also called the Cheese-fare Sunday (*Duminica lăsatului sec de brânză*). Within the framework of theology of this time, fasting and forgiveness become the path to establish an ample relation with God (Old Believers and Ukrainians inhabiting Romania call it *Maslenica*).

3. Great Lent - repentance, prayer and charity

The Monday after Cheese-fare Sunday begins the time of Great Lent (*Postul Mare, Lăsatului de Sec de Paște*). It is the longest and the most important time of fasting throughout the annual liturgical cycle. Throughout this time, members of the Orthodox Church are required to pray, resist certain food products and perform charitable deeds. These three aspects of Lent combining spiritual and physical issues are to trigger human transformation and spiritual catharsis in order for men to be prepared for the coming of the Saviour [1, p. 67].

Orthodox theology also emphasizes that man is especially prone to temptations when he undertakes these efforts and must be ready to fight the evil. During Great Lent, the believers should attend confession, receive Holy Communion and pray passionately [<http://parohialuncasi.trei.ro/craciun.html>, accessed 3.12.2013]. Fasting affords man with physical and spiritual strength and allows for controlling temptations of the body. Paradoxically it is understood as the time of joy – transformation of man’s life as a result of repentance. Theology also represents it as the time of darkness that enveloped the human race prior to the coming of the Saviour [<http://www.crestinortodox.ro/craciun/craciun-ortodox/sarbatorile-iarna-romani-68390.html>, accessed 3.12.2013]. There are detailed instructions pertaining to fasting during Lent time – a certain number of meals as well as particular food types are prescribed. Over the time period of Great Lent man cannot have meat, animal products (eggs, butter, milk, cheese), fish, olive oil and wine.

Throughout the first four days of Great Lent, from Monday to Thursday, the Great Canon of Repentance by Saint Andrew of Crete is chanted at Great Compline, divided into four parts (one part each night). It is the liturgical hymn of the Orthodox Church authored by a Jerusalem monk and the bishop of Gortyna, Saint Andrew of Crete (*660†740) and further developed by Saint Joseph’s of Sicily (†886) and Theodore the Studite of Constantinople (†826). The message of this hymn must be understood as relating to both: life of an individual man as well as the entire commonwealth of worshippers. On the one hand it is a sinful man’s call to obtain mercy and grace of resurrection for the soul enveloped in sin [<http://www.crestinortodox.ro/liturgica/viata-liturgica/canonul-sfantului-andrei-criteanul-87918.html>, accessed 6.12.2013], and on the other, it invokes the images of all the grave sins man has committed since the time of the original sin. Therefore it is considered to be a Penitential Hymn sang by the entire Christian ecumene, imploring God to show mercy, and seeking intercession of the Holy Virgin and saints. It is accompanied by pleading for the gift of tears, very significant in the Byzantine-Slavic Orthodox Theology, where it functions as a ‘fruit of soul’s passion and released sorrow’ triggered by *metanoi*. This calling for tears should not be seen as a manifestation of sentimentalism, but as a symbolic ‘second baptism’ through the living water, cleansing the sin and commencing physical and spiritual purity. It leads to a specific condition of the man’s soul, when he weeps over his own sins (*lype*), and, in the broader, mystery dimension, over the past, present and future sins of the entire humanity (*penthos*). This gift will in consequence lead to contemplating God as the “One who forgives” [5, p. 73-79; 8]. Corresponding to the entire Orthodox theology, structured on seemingly impossible oppositions, we see here the antinomy of sorrow resulting from joy, which is followed by understanding the immensity of God’s love. While beginning with one’s own sin, the hymn leads man to theophany in the light of the coming resurrection. Due to the theological overtone of the hymn, repetition of words: “God, have mercy on me, have mercy on me”, accompanied by bowing and making the sign of the cross [9], it is frequently called the penitential canon (*canon de pocăința*).

The soberness of the hymn is reinforced by performing it in tone 6 (the gravest tonation) and the black vestments of the priests.

The first Sunday of Great Lent is called the Triumph of Orthodoxy (*Duminica biruinței Ortodoxiei*) or the Feast of Orthodoxy (*Duminica Ortodoxiei*). It begins the cycle of Sundays preceding the Holy Week and the Sunday of Resurrection by following two main themes: historical and spiritual. In historical dimension, the Sunday of Triumph commemorates the restoration of icon veneration after the defeat of the iconoclast heresy, finally sanctioned at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 and then confirmed at the Synod of Constantinople in 834 [10]. To commemorate this event and the victory over all the heresies, all the clergy along with the worshippers attend an official procession with icons, crosses and gonfalons around the church. In many Orthodox regions, the procession is at the end accompanied by a reading of Synodicon of Orthodoxy, which contains anathemas against the heretics 'of all times' and affirmation to 'forever remember' (*veșnica pomenire*) the righteous fighting for loyalty to Orthodoxy. Only in the recent years, the reading of Synodicon became part of the liturgical canon in Romania. Previously the text was missing from the available translated books [*Sinodiconul Ortodoxiei*, Romanian translation, <http://www.tezaurul-ortodox.com/files/file/795-sinodiconul-ortodoxiei/>, accessed 14.10.2012]. From the spiritual perspective, reading biblical accounts on this Sunday becomes a recollection of the Old-Testament prophets announcing the coming of Christ and a reminder of the promise to see exceptional things given by God to the people. It also mentions that by virtue of the act of creation, man is the icon of God and had been called to sanction and discover the image of God within oneself.

The second Sunday of the Great Lent is also called the Sunday of Saint Gregory Palamas (*Duminica Sfântului Grigorie Palama*). At that time, the Orthodox Church remembers Gregory Palamas, a monk of Mount Athos, then the Archbishop of Thessaloniki and a great defender of Hesychasm [11, 12]. By remembering this historical figure we can see how, by adoption of appropriate spiritual disposition, such as fasting, praying, calmness, silence and focus, a man can undergo theosis in life and become a member of the light of Tabor – the uncreated light of divine glory [*Synaksarion II Niedzieli Wielkiego Postu Grzegorza Palamasa, arcybiskupa Tesaloniki*, <http://liturgia.cerkiew.pl/pages/File/docs/synaksarion-12-palamas.pdf>, accessed 24.11.2013]. Catharsis performed by fasting and penance symbolizes walking from the world of darkness into the light of Tabor. Therefore this Sunday is often called the Sunday enlightening Lent (*Duminica Luminii*).

The third Sunday of Great Lent is called by the Orthodox Church the Sunday of the Holy Cross (*Duminica Sfântei Cruci*), and the tribute is paid to the Holy Cross of Jesus. It is sometimes also called the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross or the Sunday of Bowing to the Holy Cross (*Duminica Închinării Cruci*). In Jerusalem manuscripts from the 12th century this holiday was already called 'the third Sunday of Bowing to the Cross' complementing the holidays of the Elevation of the Holy Cross (14 September) and the Procession of the Precious

Wood of the Life-Giving Cross of Jesus Christ (1 August). According to the Constantinople Typicons of the 9th and 10th centuries, the Holiday of Bowing to the Holy Cross was initially celebrated on Wednesday, at the midpoint of Great Lent. Later, the entire week of mid-Lent was appointed for celebrating the Holy Cross, dividing the adoration times into men days (Tuesdays and Wednesdays) and women days (Thursdays and Fridays) (The Evergetis Monastery). After the 12th century, the third Sunday of Great Lent was chosen to be the best time for celebrating this holiday in the Typicon of Messina [M. Simonopetritul, *Duminica Sfintei Cruci*, <http://www.crestinortodox.ro/sarbatori/duminica-sfintei-cruci/duminica-sfintei-cruci-88255.html>, accessed 14.12.2013]. To emphasize the role of the Holy Cross, on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday during the week preceding the above mentioned Sunday, the prayers read on matins and vespers call it the symbol of “crucifying the passions and desires of the body and soul for the time of lent” and thus victory over the world of sin [*Trzeci tydzień Wielkiego Postu*, http://www.liturgia.cerkiew.pl/triod/10_3tydzien.pdf, accessed 1.12.2013]. Moreover, on Saturday, at the eve of the holiday, the relics of the Holy Cross are laid on the altar during vespers and left there for the entire night with a candle burning nearby. The next day at the matins there is a symbolic elevation of the Holy Cross through gestures and the words of liturgy. The priest announcing the resurrection incenses the altar, places the cross on a tray and then takes it in solemn procession through the church accompanied by the chanting of the Thrice Holy Hymn: “We venerate Your Cross, oh Christ”. Later during the service, all the people raise chanting “Your holy resurrection we glorify”. Across Romania after the Divine Liturgy on this day, there is a procession led along the city streets with a cross decorated with flowers. This cross reminds of the resurrection of Christ and through its profound symbolism supports the man in his struggles with fasting and transforming his life. The Sunday in question reminds us that for the time of Lent the man is somehow ‘crucified’ with Jesus. The Lent signifies crucifixion of passions and desires of the body allowing man for deification. The cross becomes here the symbol of consolation, a life-giving influence to refresh our souls mortified with fasting, a reminder that ‘through pain and suffering we will see the eternal glory’. Thus, this day is sometimes also called the Sunday of Consolation (*Dumunica Mângâierii* – compare Isaiah 40.1).

The fourth Sunday of Great Lent commemorates John of the Ladder – a great monk from Saint Catharine’s monastery on Mount Sinai. It is called the Sunday of John Climacus (*Duminica Sfantului Ioan Scărarul*). The monk composed a treatise on ascetic practice *The ladder of Divine Ascent* regarded to be a guide on how to raise one’s body and soul to God through the acquisition of ascetic virtues [13, 14]. The text instructs the monks on spiritual practices and overcoming vices, figuratively portraying the nature of sin and the significance of individual virtues. In the medieval monastic Orthodox culture this became one of the most widely read work on spirituality. In Romania, the book was introduced in Greek copies and the old-Slavonic texts were available from the 15th century. The first translation into Romanian was

performed by the Moldavian metropolitan bishop Varlaam in the 17th century. Since the 15th century also the Slavic copies were established in Romania [15].

Remembering John of the Ladder and his work reminds us that the time of Lent and fasting is the parable of the road of life, from the darkness of sin to the light of the resurrection. It is a symbolic representation of the hardships you encounter on the way to deification and a reminder that salvation can only come through persistence.

The fourth Sunday falls in the middle of Great Lent and is frequently called the Mid Lent Sunday (*Miezul Păreței*) or the Laetare Sunday (*Înjumătățirea postului*). The prayers of the week following this Sunday concern the Holy Virgin and her protecting role in the life of humanity and each individual man. On Saturday, before the Sunday of Saint Mary of Egypt, the *akathist*, i.e. the great Byzantine hymn is chanted to complete the tribute paid to the *Mother of God* [*Piąty tydzień Wielkiego Postu – piątek–niedziela*, http://www.liturgia.cerkiew.pl/triod/14_5tydzien_last.pdf, accessed 23.11.2012]. Although the service had already been held in the 7th century, the name *akathist* originating in Greek *ακαθιστος* and meaning ‘remain standing while singing’, emerged in the Typicon books at a quite late time – probably not earlier than in the Constantinople Typicon in 1838 [16]. The hymn is divided into 12 (sometimes 13) parts each of which is composed of kontakions and oikos starting with the successive letters of the Greek alphabet. The author of the hymn and the exact date of origin are unclear. The principal hypothesis ascribes the authorship to George the Monk (Hamartolos) who was to write the text to commemorate the historical events of 677, when Constantinople, attacked by the Arabs was saved by the miraculous intervention of the Holy Mother. Another hypothesis assigns the origin of the hymn to the year 626, when Constantinople, in the reign of Heraclius, was attacked by the Persians and Eurasian Avars. The hymn is said to be authored by Sergius I, the Patriarch of Constantinople, who assumed the role of the defender during this attack. There were other assumptions crediting the origin of the hymn of Romanos the Melodist or George Pisida. Initially, it had been chanted at the 7th of August to commemorate the victory of the Byzantines over Persians and Eurasian Avars in 626. It is not clear when the celebration of the rite was moved to the period of Great Lent. The hymn emerged in Romania in the 17th century, in Slavic manuscripts and liturgy versions from Icusești and Bisericani, together with the *Paraclisul Maicii Domnului*, gradually contributing to the aspect of the Marian cult [17]. On the other hand, it was first published in Romanian language in 1673 in *Uniejevobearing* the title of *Acatistul Născătoarei de Dumnezeu*. In the Orthodox Church the hymn is chanted during liturgy on Saturday of the fifth week of Lent, therefore this Saturday is sometimes also called the Saturday of the *Akathist* (*Sâmbata Acatistului*). The gravity and majesty of the ritual is enhanced by chanting it in tone 7 – the most ceremonial tone revealing the joy of the resurrection. The *Akathist* had also been presented in the Orthodox iconography, however the exact date of origin is difficult to specify. The researchers claim it had initially been portrayed in miniatures,

then sacral cloths and icons and finally on the inside and outside walls of the churches. In Romania, the *Akathist* has been represented in iconography since the 16th century in twenty four scenes, illustrating the successive 12 *oikos* and *kontakions* placed on the outside walls of Orthodox monasteries and churches in South Bukovina (including Arbore, Humor, Vatra Moldovița, Părhăuți, Sfântul Ilie near Suceava). The researchers assume that the first twelve parts of the hymn make up the so-called historical part. The succeeding twelve parts of the *Akathist* are the so-called mystical part, six of them devoted to Jesus Christ and six to the Mother of God [18].

On the fifth Sunday, the Orthodox Church commemorates Saint Mary of Egypt, the penitent prostitute living at the turn of the 5th and 6th centuries. This day has been called the Sunday of Saint Mary of Egypt (*Duminica Sfintei Maria Egiteanca*). We sometimes call it the Sunday of Repentance in Romania (*Duminica Pocăinței*) [19; L. Popescu, *La Duminica Sfântei Maria Egipțeanca*, <http://www.rostonline.org/blog/razvan/2009/04/la-duminica-sfintei-maria-egipteanca.html>, accessed 6.04.2013]. To understand the theology of this Sunday of Lent and the essence of the Orthodox repentance we need to envisage the fate of Saint Mary. After seventeen years of being a prostitute, she joined pilgrims heading for Jerusalem. There, at the doors of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, far away from the crowds, she became aware of her destitute life and underwent spiritual transformation. The remaining part of her life was spent in solitude at the River Jordan, praying and repenting. The Orthodox Church not only does not condemn Saint Mary of Egypt, but sets her as an example of holiness, repentance and penitence. She is already mentioned at Matins on Thursday preceding the above mentioned Sunday and treated as a verbal icon representing theological truth about penance [*Piąty tydzień Wielkiego Postu – czwartek*, http://www.liturgia.cerkiew.pl/triod/13_5tydzien_czw.pdf, accessed 23.11.2012]. She indicates that none of the sins and wrongdoings can separate man from God if the former repents and expresses true regret for his sins leading the life in the light of Christ's resurrection until the end of his days. The history of Mary is full of hope, recounting the story of repentance and return of a man to the lost kingdom. The transformation of life represents the grace of God acting within the human existence, supporting hopes and encouraging changes. Conversion means here an attainment of mercy, and the beginning of a new life is often filled with a difficult struggle to be faithful to the granted grace. By the example of Saint Mary of Egypt, Christ shows that he will come to the greatest sinners and it is never too late to transform your life.

4. Flowers Sunday - the anticipation of the resurrection

The week after this Sunday is called the Flowers Week (*Săptămîna floriilor*). On Thursday, during the vespers, the Great Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete is chanted again, this time in its entirety. On Friday, the forty-day fasting at the Orthodox Church is completed; however the believers will still continue

fasting for another week. On Saturday (prior to Flowers Sunday) Romanians celebrate the Saturday of Lazarus (*Sâmbata lui Lăzăr*), which reminds us of the amazing story of resurrecting the dead Lazarus, a friend of Jesus Christ. Within the liturgical set, this event becomes the harbinger of Crucifixion, which will already take place next week – an anticipation of Jesus Christ making the supreme sacrifice, which is the symbolic victory of life over death. On this day, some regions of Romania celebrate the feast of the dead, called Flower Forefather's Eve (*Moșii de Florii*).

The sixth Sunday of Great lent is called the Flowers Sunday (*Duminica Floriilor, Floriile*) and it is the beginning of the Holy Week. It is one of the oldest Christian feasts, mentioned, inter alia, by: Saint Epiphanius, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Ambrose and Saint Cyril of Jerusalem as well as Egeria the 4th century pilgrim [20]. In Romania, the earliest accounts of this day were chronicled by deacon Paul of Aleppo (Bulosinbaz-Za'im, circa 1627–1699), travelling in 1653 and 1656 in the company of Macarios III Zaim, the Patriarch of Antioch, across Romanian lands on their way to East and North Europe [21]. He himself had the opportunity to witness this feast at the court of Constantin II Șerban [4]. The oldest liturgy books from Romania call the celebration Palm (*Stâlpăriile*) or Flowers (*Floriile*) [22]. According to the research sources, the feast has already been very popular on the Romanian lands in the 18th century. The believers came to the matins and had their willow branches consecrated. They were then distributed among the faithful, who were to hold them during the Holy Liturgy. In contemporary times we also celebrate the ritual of consecrating willow branches at the Orthodox Church. They are collected by monks on the day before, and also by the believers in Orthodox churches, and then solemnly given to them after the collective consecration on Sunday.

5. Holy Week - Memory and the New Life in Christ

The Flowers Sunday begins the Holy Week (*Săptămîna Mare*), alternatively called the Week of Lord's Passion (*Săptămîna patimilor*) in Romania. From this day on to Thursday, the churches host vigils, the so-called *denia*. It is a Romanian word that originated in Church Slavonic variant: [bŭ]dēnije – all-night vigil (in Old Church Slavonic – denije)] and denotes a special type of a vigil service held during vespers throughout the Holy Week [S. Dumistrăcel, *Deniile, Lumina*, 8 Aprilie 2009, <http://ziarullumina.ro/opinii/deniile>, accessed 3.12.2013]. Transylvanians also use an alternative term: *straste* – ‘passion’, ‘martyrdom’ originating in the Slavic *страстникъ/страстни* meaning martyrdom and derived from the book of liturgical cult called *Strastnic*, dedicated to be read during Great Lent services, issued on Romanian lands since the 18th century [23; G. Mircea and D. Dreghiciu, *Un colligat de secol al XVIII-lea de la Petrești, aflat în colecția Muzeului Municipal Sebeș. Cu privire specială asupra părții manuscrise*, http://www.cclbsebes.ro/docs/Sebus_2_2010/18_Mircea_Dreghiciu.pdf, accessed 3.12.2012]. Most likely the name of the book and services in

Transylvania originated in Greek Catholic and not Orthodox sources. Evidence on the *denia* service held in Romania was first mentioned towards the end of the 16th century in the books of deacon Coresi, and metropolitan bishops: Dosoftei and Antim the Iberian [<http://ziarullumina.ro/opinii/deniile>]. In Romanian liturgical practice they are generally held at approximately 7:00 pm [*Deniile din Săptămîna Patimilor*, <http://www.crestinortodox.ro/datini-obiceiuri-superstitii/deniile-saptamana-patimilor-68760.html>, accessed 15.08.2012], combining three services in the typical daily cycle: at 3:00 pm, 6:00 pm, and 9:00 pm. The abundance and symbolism of liturgical texts for these days is enormous. First of all, they are composed of a number of psalms resembling sinfulness and the fall of man. They also profess the joy of God with a man who fulfilled the desire of his heart. It is a reminder of the eternal glory and salvation that are waiting for the penitent, and Christ the Bridegroom coming at midnight, bestowing his blessing upon the vigilant. The chanted prayers already include some content relating to the Resurrection of Christ. The Orthodox Church calls on God to arise and scatter the enemy. The first three days of the week are devoted to reflecting on the last days of Christ's life and the meaning of his teachings, reading excerpts from the four Gospels divided into nine parts. The ritual is performed by the priest standing in the middle of the church and reading texts laid on the *analogion* covered by a liturgy cloth embroidered with a cross ornamented with flowers. He is holding burning candles in his hands. At this time a liturgy of Presanctified Gifts (*Liturghia Darurilor mai înainte sfințite*, compare Mathew 21.18–43) [Biskup Jerzy (Pańkowski), *Charakter i specyfika Liturgii uprzednio poświęconych Darów*, http://www.cerkiew.pl/index.php?id=prawoslawie&a_id=296, accessed 3.12.2012] is also held. On Monday we remember Jesus leaving for his martyrdom to Jerusalem, the beginning of suffering and the judgment of Pilatus. We also read an excerpt from St Mathew's Gospel, and the parable of Saint John Chrysostom of the fruitless fig tree, begging God to "tear the list of human sins to pieces". During these readings the Gospel is laid on the lectern, two candles are lit on both sides and believers gathered in the church listen with their heads bowed. On Tuesday, the Church presents Judas Iscariot renouncing the Light and denouncing Christ to the Jews, as well as remembers Pharisees conspiring against Jesus. During the prayers of this day we hear the voice of a man who, due to his carelessness, was late to the coming of Saviour and up to this moment has remained in the darkness of sin. This symbolic representation proves that the grace of conversion to God is granted in any circumstances. The passages of the Old Testament about Moses, miraculously saved from death and Job who would not renounce his God even in the face of losing all his property (Exodus 2.5–10, Job 1.13–22) are read. On Wednesday matins, the Gospel of Saint John reminds us the parable of grain of wheat falling on the earth and dying as a necessity for the following fruit. The words of Jesus about the Light coming onto Earth and salvation of all those staying in the Light are mentioned in the prayers of that day as well. An adulterous woman, who recognized Jesus as the Saviour and anointed his body with oils and the tears of repentance

[http://www.liturgia.cerkiew.pl/triod/16_wt_pn_czw.pdf, accessed 12.04.2013], is set as an example of penitence. Once again the Judas's 'kiss of treachery' is remembered and God is asked to protect his children against a fate like this. Moreover, Ezekiel's prophecy on messaging Jesus to Israelites who did not recognize the Messiah in him (John 12.17–50; Ezekiel 2.3–10, 3:1–3) is also read.

The most solemn services, held in the evenings of Holy Thursday (*Joia Mare*) and Good Friday (*Vinerea Mare*) are the *denia* (In Romanian tradition Good Friday is also called the Dry Friday (*Vinerea Seacă*) or the Friday of Torment (*Vinerea a Patimilor*)). On Holy Thursday, the service held is called the small *denia* (*deniamică*) and during prayers four events are mentioned: the sacred washing of feet, mystical double Last Supper – 'The Pascha of the Order and the Pascha new: The Master's Body, Blood', the transcendent prayer and the Betrayal of Judas (Luke 22.1–39) [http://www.liturgia.cerkiew.pl/triod/16_wt_pn_czw.pdf, accessed 3.12.2012]. In Romania, the clergyman reads twelve excerpts from synoptic gospels, which are ascribed to Good Friday matins. Having read the fifth Gospel, at the words of Antiphon 15: „Today, He who suspended the earth in the waters is suspended on a cross”, the celebrants take the cross from the altar area and place it in the middle of the nave, incensing it, bowing to it and kissing it. After the eighth Gospel of passion, also called the 'Gospel of washing', some of the Romanian monasteries uphold the ritual of sacred foot washing to the words of canon by Kyr Kosmas. The rite has been active at least since the 17th century, which was mentioned by Saint Paul of Aleppo [4, p. 70]. The priest takes his top garment (canonical) off, ties a towel around his waist, pours water into the basin and washes the feet of twelve worshippers, wiping them dry and kissing them at the end. Also on this day, during the evening vespers, the Orthodox celebrate a ritual of great oil sanctifying (*Sfântirea Marelui Mir*). It is said to have originated in Judaism, when Jehova told Moses how to arrange the cult of God among the Israelites. It was already at that time that preparing oil from the olive trees following a particular ritual and anointing the objects of cult as well as people such as: the kings, priests and prophets was intended to sanctify them (Exodus 30.22–33; 1 Samuel 16.13, 24.7, 26.9). It was a sign of God's blessing, leading into the sacred sphere, protecting the one who accepted it (Deuteronomy 7.13, 11.14; Jeremiah 31.12; Joel 2.1–9). The Jews were also awaiting the anointed (the Messiah, in Hebrew: *mosziach* – 'the anointed', 'anointed with the holy oil'), whose arrival was announced by Jehova (Isaiah 11.2–5; Jeremiah 23.5; 33.15). In New Testament, Jesus, called the Messiah, had been anointed by the Holy Spirit and passed the ability to heal by placing the hands on the sick and anointing them with the holy oils to the apostles (Mark 6.7–13, Jacob 5.13–19). On Holy Thursday, at the Orthodox Church in Romania, the ritual is usually performed in the nave of the church. The Holy Oil is placed next to the Gospels on the table situated in the middle of the nave. Candles are lit and placed in special vessels. After confessions and prayers, the priests take the oil and make the sign of the cross on the foreheads and hands of the worshippers. Sometimes

the ritual takes place in the courtyard of the church [Monastyr Suzana, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mz_7XnFoksU, accessed 1.12.2012; Monastyr Zamfira, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XITPuHEQRM>, accessed 1.12.2012]. This celebration, strengthened by the power of fasting, brings back the grace of God healing the soul and body of a sinful man.

The *denia* of Good Friday, also called the *large denia* (*Denia mare*), celebrates the ritual of Jesus' funeral (which belongs to the matins of the Holy Saturday). For this reason it is often called the *denia* of the Lord's Funeral (*Denia Prohodului Domnului*) in the Romanian tradition. The first translation of the service conducted by the hieromonk Makarios was presented in Buzău, Romania in 1836, and then, in the years 1846 and 1853, the text was translated by Anton Pann, and was named the *Epitaful sau slujba înmormântării Domnului și Mantuitorului nostru Iisus Hristos* (*The Epitaph or the funeral service of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*) [N.D. Necula, *Slujba Prohodului*, <http://www.crestinortodox.ro/paste/saptamana-patimilor/slujba-prohodului-88660.html>, accessed 2.12.2012].

The service of this day is celebrated very solemnly; a great importance is attributed to this ceremony in the Theology of the times and the cult of worshippers. In the course of the ritual the officiators take the Epitaphios (*Sfantul Aer, Sfantul Epitaf*) [N. Necula, *Postul Mare – Ce sunt deniile*, <http://www.nistea.com/postul-mare/denia-denie-ce-sunt-deniile.htm>, accessed 26.09.2012] with the image of Christ laid in the grave from the altar part and move it to the nave where it is laid on a table specially prepared for that purpose, and placed in the middle of the church, underneath the dome. This site is called the Sacred Sepulchre (*mormântul Domnului*). Having finished the prayers over the Epitaphios, the priest kisses the representation of the body of Christ on the cloth and often moves on his knees under the table where the cloth is placed. Sometimes the sepulchre is approached by women who bring mire and fragrances – they bow to the representation of Christ, kiss the Epitaphios and then sprinkle it with fragrances and also pass under the table. Other participants of the service follow. Passing underneath the Epitaphios is understood as the harbinger of salvation. The Orthodox believe that by their symbolic death with Jesus Christ they will be absolved of all their sins. Sometimes the worshippers pass under the Epitaphios three times to signify the three days Christ spent in the grave. The Epitaphios is an object of extreme cult – the Orthodox treat it as a relic, ornament it with flowers, candles, painted eggs and place some money in the vicinity of the cloth. They continuously pray next to it begging for the needed favours. In some of the villages in Bukovina, the worshippers place four small firs in the four corners of the Epitaphios, similarly to the habit of putting firs around coffins of the dead. The worshippers frequently touch the Epitaphios with their hands believing in the healing properties of the cloth.

The depicted day is often called the Black Friday (*Vinerea neagră*), which is related to Jesus dying on the cross. To commemorate this event, worshippers observe the so-called *black fasting* limiting the diet to drinking water.

The services held on Holy Saturday mainly consist of weeping over Jesus's fate; however the resurrection tone is slowly starting to dominate. It gives the worshippers hope that the Lord will arise from the dead. The liturgy of this day remarkably emphasizes the antinomy of death and life, so characteristic of Orthodox theology. It is a day of pondering death, however, already the time to enjoy resurrection. Psalms are chanted and excerpts from the Bible are read by the priests during the morning prayers. One of them is the prophecy of Ezekiel about the dry bones in the Valley of Josaphat, which are revived by God with his will, spirit and words. They rise from the dead as a plentiful nation – a symbol of new Israel, resurrected to new life. This symbolic announcement calling for a new life is combined with the Church welcoming Jesus to resurrect: "Stand up and come to our help! Redeem us because of your love!" (Psalm 44/43, 27) [24]. The first Letter of Saint Paul to Corinthians on Christ being sacrificed as a true Pascha is also read. The next step is to ask God to arise and disperse the enemies. After the prayer of head bowing, the solemn kissing of the shroud follows. During vespers 15 excerpts from the Old Testament are read reminding us of God's presence across history, including the creation of the world and man, the might of Jerusalem, the requirement to celebrate Pascha passed to the Israelites by Jehova, the history of Jonah the prophet, the Lord revealing himself to Joshua by the city of Jericho on the day of Pascha, Israelites crossing the Red Sea, miraculous restoration to life of the child by the prophets Elijah and Elisha, the sacrifice of Abraham, saving three children from a burning fiery furnace [<http://www.liturgia.cerkiew.pl/pages/File/docs/meka-07-sobota.pdf>, accessed 1.03.2013]. The last section recalls the burial of human sin with the death of Jesus and commencement of a new life together with His resurrection. After the end of vespers the faithful remain in the church and share the gifts composed of bread, wine and dried fruit, and listen to excerpts of readings from Acts of the Apostles.

On Saturday Night the Midnight Office of Pascha begins. Along chanting of the prayer 'Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us', the shroud is incensed and carried outside the church. In the solemn procession, accompanied by poignant tolling of a bell, it is three times carried around the church, while stopping and praying three times as well [*The celebration of Good Friday's Denia at the Metropolitan Cathedral in Bucuresti*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=086uGhOkn80>, accessed 2.12.2012].

This symbolic funeral procession is to represent Jesus descending to the darkness of Hades, wandering around it, and announcing Adam – the so-called 'everyman' – the joy of resurrection [25]. After the procession is finished, everyone stops and the shroud is placed at the closed gates of the church. There, the priest reads the Gospel of Resurrection (Mark 16.1–8). He announces that Christ has been resurrected and that death has been crumpled by death. The doors to the church are opened, clergymen and worshippers enter the building passing underneath the shroud, touching it with their hands and making the sign of the cross. It is then carried into the temple and placed on the altar

where it remains to the day of Ascension to Heaven. In the morning, the Paschal Matins begin.

The celebrations of Holy Sunday are completed by the Eucharistic liturgy of John Chrysostom, celebrated immediately after the Matins. Next, the food is blessed and worshippers can go home to eat paschal breakfast.

The analysis of the paschal cycle symbolism within Romanian religiosity, performed on the basis of canonical religious texts as well as Orthodox rituals, lead to the conclusion that it is in each case a reminder of the history of salvation. In Eastern Christianity it is also a route to repent, revealed to men seeking God. By experiencing *metanoia* and atonement, man participates in the plan of salvation of mankind, which is each year remembered by repeating images of the crucifixion and celebration of the Passover.

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