



Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

PASCHAL MESSAGE OF HIS GRACE, BISHOP PAUL
April 16, 2017

Beloved Clergy, Laity, and Monastics of the Diocese of the Midwest,

“Waitin’, watchin’ the clock, it’s four o’clock, it’s got to stop. Tell him; take no more, she practices her speech as he opens the door, she rolls over. Pretends to sleep, as he looks her over. She lies and says she’s in love with him can’t find a better man. She dreams in color, she dreams in red, can’t find a better man. Can’t find a better man.” Better Man by Pearl Jam

During the course of Lent we have been “waitin’, watchin’.” I began this letter with lyrics from the Pearl Jam song “Better Man” because it speaks to two issues, that someone is waitin’ and watchin’ for a better man. But it also speaks to disappointment with the better man spoken about in this song. (“She lies and says she’s in love with him.”)

Throughout Great Lent we have heard these wonderful readings from Hebrews on Saturdays and Sundays that have gone to great lengths to point out the fact that the sacrifices and rites of the Old Covenant were inferior to the **once and for all** offering of the Great High Priest Jesus Christ, the One Who offers and is offered; both priest and victim. The rites of the Old Testament had to be repeated. The Lord offered Himself once and for all. The High Priest in Leviticus entered the Holy of Holies made by hands every year with the blood of animals to atone for the sins of people as well as his own. Christ enters the Heavenly Holies of Holies not made by hands with His own blood to atone for our sins, not His own as He was sinless and was more than mere man.

*“For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”
Hebrews 9:12-13*

The better man of the Old Testament rites was inferior to the Better Man of the New Covenant; His offering is the Sacrament of the Church. The Old Covenant was a shadow, a type of what was to come. The Old Covenant high priest didn’t get the job done. The High Priest of the New Covenant gets the job done.

“For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Titus 2:11-3

The time of Holy Week has come, and all that we have been watchin’ and waitin’ for has been revealed and fulfilled in the Life Creating Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the “appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” It is this “appearing” that the thief on the cross experiences that we sing about at Holy Friday Matins:

“The wise thief You made worthy of Paradise in a single moment O Lord. By the wood of the Your Cross illumine me as well and save me.” Exapostilarion of Holy Friday Matins

Isn’t this the eternal moment of “Today” that we have been waitin’ and watchin’ for during the course of Lent and Holy Week? The Better Man who has come, is coming, and is to come. He is the One Chrysostom refers to in his Paschal Sermon concerning what is encountered when Christ descends to Hades:

“Hell took a body, and discovered God. It took earth, and encountered Heaven. It took what it saw, and was overcome by what it did not see.”

Can’t find a better man.

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

With love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul
Bishop of Chicago and the Midwest

To be circulated among the faithful of the Diocese.