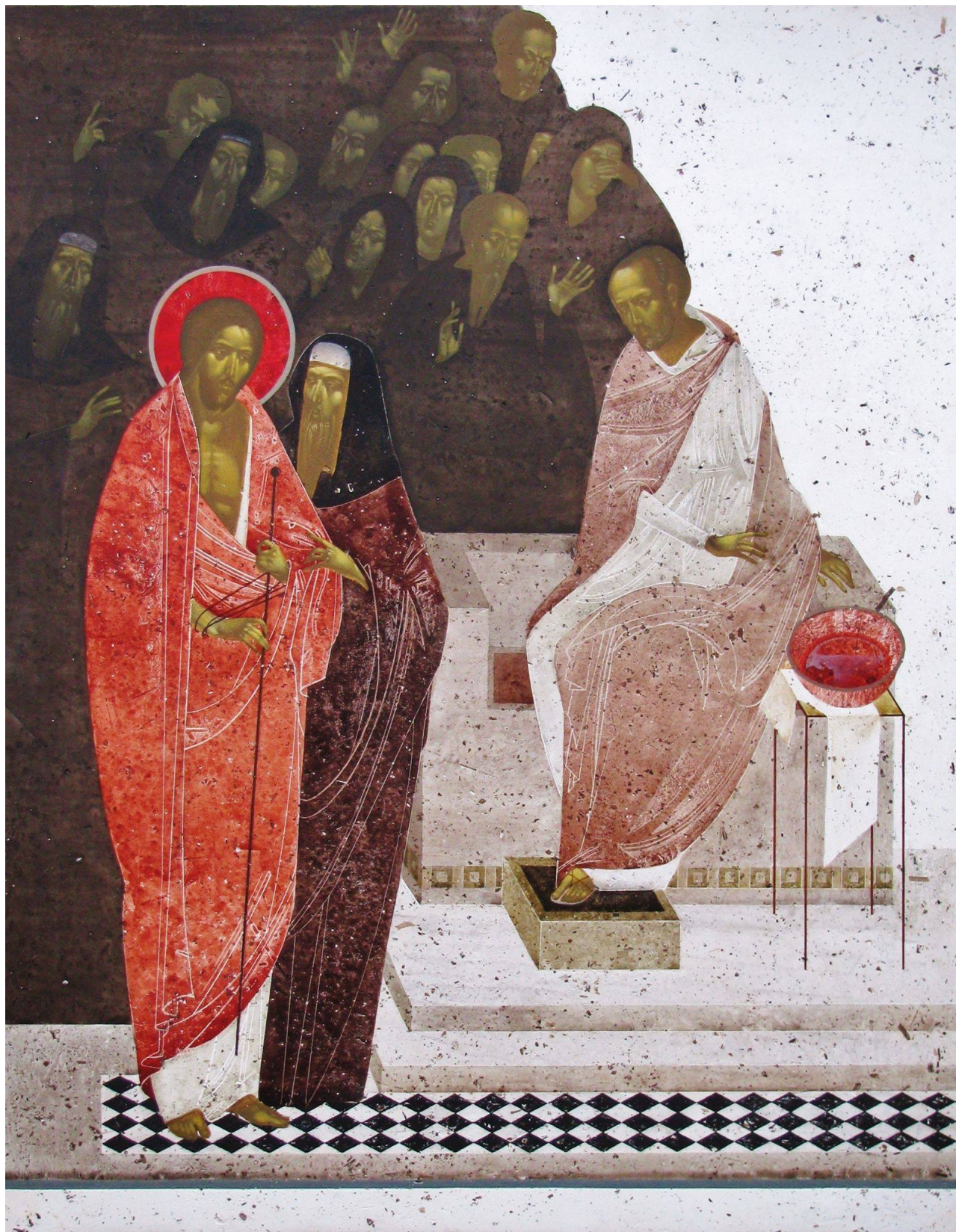


Lenten Day of Recollection  
Witnesses of the Lord



February 22, 2023



# Witnesses of the Lord:

## Teachers of Almsgiving, Prayer, Fasting

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*Our main theme will be the examination of traditional Lenten practices—almsgiving, prayer, fasting—in light of various witnesses, including the Ephesian Church in Revelation, the Beloved Disciple, and Our Lady of Sorrows. We will also examine another theme that I think can become a Lenten practice: Hope. We will examine Hope's witness, the Cross of Christ, by seeing what Hope accomplishes, considering Vexilla regis prodeunt and the Dream of the Rood.*

### Outline:

- I. Why Lenten Practices?
  - A. Broken Communal Witness: The Remedy of Almsgiving against Complacency.
  - B. The Witness of the Heartbeat of God: The Transformation of Eros in Prayer.
  - C. The Witness of True Fasting: Fasting from our Assumptions.
- II. The Regal Banners Fly—Another Lenten Practice: Hope as Means to Conversion.
  - A. The Noonday Devil's Banner: Hope's Absence
  - B. The Banner of Christ: *Vexilla regis prodeunt*
- III. The Last Witness: The Lonely Rood



## A Broken Communal Witness:

# The Ephesian Church of Revelation

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### The Message to Ephesus:

Religion without Holiness/Charity—  
The Temptation of Contentment  
and the salve of almsgiving.

"I know your works, your toil and your endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them to be false. 3 I also know that you are enduring and bearing up for the sake of my name and that you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, **that you have abandoned the love you had at first**. 5 Remember, then, from where you have fallen; **repent and do the works you did at first**. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. 6 Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the **tree of life** that is in the paradise of God." (Rev 2:2-6)



- 1. External acts of piety and perseverance in religion mean nothing without love.*
- 2. Contentment is one of the most dangerous and hidden temptations for disciples.*
- 3. What does repentance look like if your love has grown cold?*

# The Witness of the Heartbeat of God:

## The Beloved Disciple

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### The Insight of Eros:

Learning to Love All by Learning to Love One—The End of Eros and the Intercourse of Prayer.

We fall in love not only with the person of the Other, but **with everything that is his**, and with everything that is related to him. Whatever he makes and whatever he touches, with the music he loves, the streets he walks, the landscapes we have looked at together. If you happen to have fallen in love with God himself, **even for a fraction of a second**, the quivering of yearning remains in every cool drop of spring

rain, in the snow which converse the grey lace of the shadbush, in the shimmering blue sky of a summer afternoon, and in the smell of autumn. Every aspect of beauty, every skillful artifact is a gift of erotic joy granted to you.

1. *Eros defines a direct and particular desire for another, a “wanting to be” with the other—not only sexual intercourse.*
2. *The end, or purpose, of eros is learning that by loving one and all associated with that one, we learn to love God and all associated with that One.*
3. *Have you ever listened to another’s heartbeat? Perhaps try it, and understand each beat is God’s grace of life; imagine St. John listening to Christ’s heart, you listening to Christ’s heart. This is prayer.*

# The Witness of True Fasting:

## Our Lady of Sorrows

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### True Fasting:

Not to Consume Our Own Ideas—  
Viewing Our Lady from Afar.

### our lady of sorrows

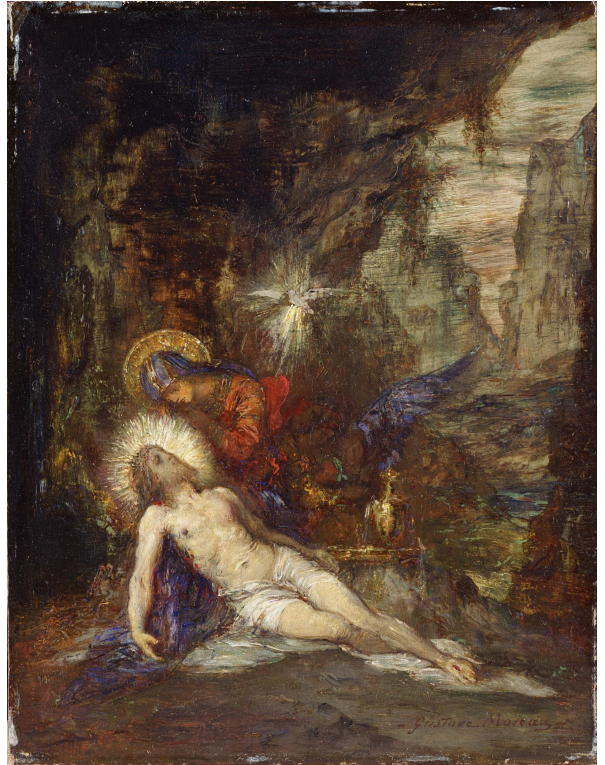
Why my mother chopped off her hair  
and followed me to the school bus stop  
that morning in second grade,  
I don't know. Or why

she bent down sobbing  
don't let go of my hand.  
How long did we stand by the 7-11?  
Other kids hushed, watching.

When the bus clunked to a stop  
I climbed on first, grabbed a seat in back,  
my mother outside, hands curled  
on my window, her face a blur

as the bus jerked away.  
The kid beside me punched my arm.  
Who was that man with you  
crying so hard?

I said I didn't know.  
Three times I swore, I don't know him.



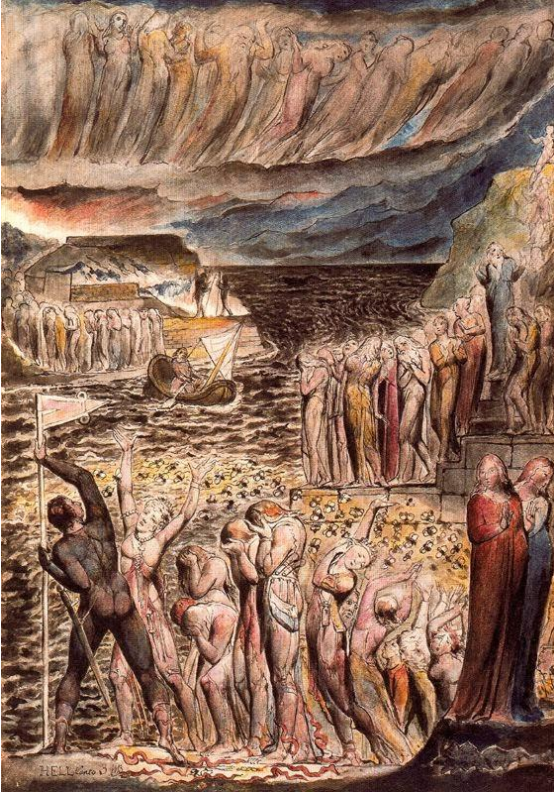
1. Fasting also means  
abstaining from our  
assumptions about others.
2. Place yourselves in the  
shoes of someone watching  
Mary at the foot of the cross.  
What thoughts do you have?
3. What thoughts does Mary  
have beneath the cross,  
knowing others watch, judge?



## The Noonday Devil's Banner:

### Vexilla Regis Prodeunt Inferni

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And he to me: "This miserable way  
is taken by the sorry souls of those  
who lived without disgrace and without praise.

They now commingle with the coward angels,  
the company of those who were not rebels  
nor faithful to their God, but stood apart.

The heavens, that their beauty not be lessened,  
have cast them out, nor will deep Hell receive  
them—even the wicked cannot glory in them"...

And I, looking more closely, saw a **banner**  
that, as it wheeled about, raced on—**so quick**  
**that any respite seemed unsuited to it.**

Behind that banner trailed so long a file  
of people—I should never have believed  
that death could have unmade so many souls.

After I had identified a few,  
I saw and recognized the shade of him  
who made, through cowardice, the great refusal.

At once I understood with certainty:  
this company contained **the cowardly,**  
**hateful to God and to His enemies.**

These wretched ones, **who never were alive,**  
went naked and were stung again, again  
by **horseflies** and by **wasps** that circled them...

*1. Neither heaven nor hell wants  
the souls of the indecisive.*

*2. The "Banner of Constant  
Busy-ness" distracts people  
from interior work and prayer.*

*3. Reflect: what banners am I  
following currently?  
What banners do I want to  
follow?*

# The Banner of the King:

## Vexilla Regis Prodeunt

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ABROAD the **regal banners** fly,  
now shines the **Cross's mystery**:  
upon it Life did death endure,  
and yet by death did life procure.

Who, wounded with a direful spear,  
did purposely to **wash us clear**  
from stain of sin, pour out a **flood**  
of precious water mixed with blood.

That which the prophet-king of old  
hath in mysterious verse foretold,  
is now accomplished, whilst we see  
God ruling the nations from a **Tree**.

O lovely and refulgent **Tree**,  
adorned with purpled majesty;  
culled from a worthy stock, to bear  
those limbs which sanctified were.

**Blest Tree**, whose **happy branches bore**  
**the wealth** that did the world restore;  
the beam that did that Body weigh  
which raised up Hell's expected prey.

Hail **Cross, of hopes** the most sublime!  
Now, in the mournful Passion time;  
grant to the just increase of grace,  
and every sinner's crimes efface.

Blest Trinity, **salvation's spring**  
may every soul Thy praises sing;  
to those Thou grantest conquest by  
the Holy Cross, rewards supply. Amen.



1. The Tree of Life, the cross, counters the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.
2. Vexilla Regis is not only the cross or the resurrection banner of Christ, but our baptism.
3. The cross is the cause of all the forms of conversion we have spoken about. What are your crosses that cause your conversion?

# The Last Witness: The Lonely Rood

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"It was long since – I yet remember it – that I was hewn at holt's end, moved from my stem. Strong fiends seized me there, worked me for spectacle; cursèd ones lifted me. On shoulders men bore me there, then fixed me on hill; fiends enough fastened me. **Then saw I mankind's Lord** come with great courage when he would mount on me. **Then dared I not against the Lord's word bend**

**or break, when I saw earth's fields shake. All fiends I could have felled, but I stood fast.** The young hero stripped himself – he, God Almighty – strong and stout-minded. He mounted high gallows, bold before many, when he would loose mankind. **I shook when that Man clasped me. I dared, still, not bow to earth, fall to earth's fields, but had to stand fast.** Rood was I reared. **I lifted a mighty King, Lord of the heavens, dared not to bend.** With dark nails they drove me through: on me those sores are seen, open malice-wounds. I dared not scathe anyone. **They mocked us both, we two together.** All wet with blood I was, poured out from that Man's side, after ghost he gave up. Much have I born on that hill of fierce fate. I saw the God of hosts harshly stretched out. Darkneses had wound round with clouds the corpse of the Wielder, bright radiance; a shadow went forth, dark under heaven. All creation wept, King's fall lamented. Christ was on rood. But there eager ones came from afar to that noble one. I beheld all that..."

1. The cross, an instrument of torture and ridicule, becomes a symbol of hope and glory.
2. The Lord's death on the cross caused its conversion.
3. Imagine yourself to be the cross on which Christ is crucified. Do you budge? Do you weaken? Or do you hold him up for all to see?