

those in the tombs giving life," the priest opens the doors of the church knocking with his hand-cross.' he faithful enter the church, glorifying the Risen Christ, and like the myrrh-bearing women of the Paschal morning—the first witnesses of the Resurrection—they bring the good news of the Resurrection to the whole world: "This is the day of Resurrection! Let us be illumined by the feast! Let us embrace each other. Let us call brothers and sisters even those that hate us, and forgive all by the Resurrection, and so let us cry: Christ is risen!"¹⁹⁴

d. The Ascension

- 236 During the forty days after his Resurrection, Christ appeared to his disciples, confirming them in faith. He then ascended into heaven and was seated at the right hand of the Father: "He led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (*Lk* 24:50-52; *see Mk* 16:19). The apostles' joy lies in the fact that in his Ascension Christ does not abandon the world: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (*Mt* 28:20). Christ invisibly abides in the world, in which humanity is called to attain salvation. The apostles receive from Christ the blessing and commission to preach the Gospel to all creation (*see Mt* 16:15) and to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them to observe all that Christ commanded them (*see Mt* 28:9-20).
- 237 In his Ascension, Christ raised renewed human nature to divine glory. In the liturgical stichera of the Ascension feast sings of the open "doors to heaven" and how Christ enters "into heaven," where he is greeted by angelic powers in fear and trepidation. He is lifted up "upon the clouds," above the cherubim and "higher" than heaven. As God, to him belongs a "place" at the right of the Father. In God's plan, the Ascension is the condition for the descent of the Holy Spirit: "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you" (*Jn* 16:7). Christ ascends to the Father "for us men and for our salvation" (Symbol of Faith). "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you maybe also" (*Jn* 14:2-3). Just as Christ ascended in glory, so in glory he will also return again.

¹⁹⁴ *Floral Triodion*, Sunday of Holy Pascha, Paschal Matins, stichera of Pascha.

*He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end
(Symbol of Faith)
He will come again to reward each according to their works
(Anaphora of the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great)*

4. The Second Coming of Christ in Glory

- 238 At the trial before the Sanhedrin, in response to the question from the high priest Caiaphas whether he is the "Son of the Blessed" (*Mk* 14:61), Christ quotes the words of the prophet Daniel about the coming of the Son of Man in glory: "And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (*Mk* 14:62; *see Dn* 7:13). After Christ's Ascension, the angels announced to the apostles: "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (*Acts* 1:11). Just as he ascended in his human nature to divine glory, so he will return again in his glorified human nature for judgment.
- 239 At the glorious second coming of Christ (in Greek, *parousia*), the judgment of the living and the dead will be a moment of blessing for the righteous. At the Judgment, all that is secret and hidden will become manifest and visible: "Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known" (*Lk* 12:2-3).
- 240 The glorious second coming of Christ will also bring about the glorification of the human race (*see Col* 3:4), which is the fulfilment of divinization, the attainment of the "full stature of Christ" (*Eph* 4:13). Christ began the glorification of the humankind with his Resurrection, and from then on, throughout the history of the Church, the glorification has continued through the witness manifested by the saints. "Christ is risen from the dead, he who is the first-fruits of those that had been asleep, the firstborn of creation and the Creator of all created things; he restored in himself the nature of our race grown corrupt."¹⁹⁵ And then, in response: "O Lord, Maker of nature, the world offers you the godly martyrs as the first-fruits of nature."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ *Octoechos*, Tone 3, Sunday Matins, First Sessional Hymn.

¹⁹⁶ *Horologion*, Daily Service, Saturday, Kontakion for the Martyrs.