

Caretakers of the Dead



Session 6 – Teens



Caretakers of God's Creation

Consistory Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministry
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA

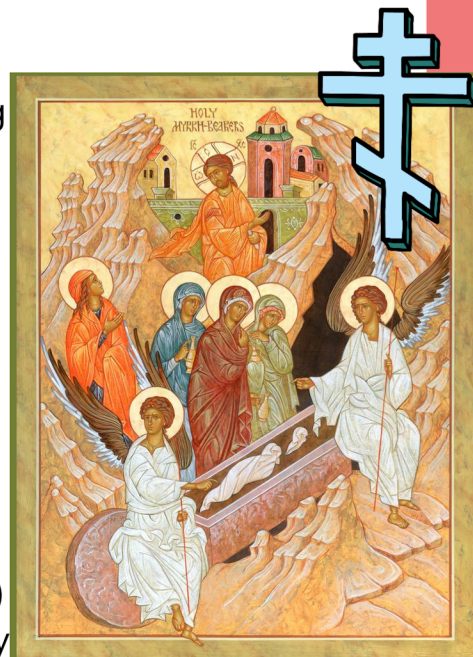


God didn't create death. He created life. But because of Adam and Eve's sin death became a part of our reality, death entered into creation. Most of us don't like to think or talk about death. Our society has been described as a "death denying culture." But as human beings we know that there is no way to get around the problem of death; unless we live till the Lord's second coming we will all experience biological death.

As Christians we know, as we will begin singing this month, that "Christ has trampled down death by death," that He has become "the firstborn of the dead." Our celebration of Pascha is nothing if not a celebration of Christ's victory over death. But people still die; the dead are still in the graves. How are we to understand and respond to this? One of the ways we Christians do this is by caring for the dead. And how do we care for the dead? Practically and prayerfully.

On Good Friday as well as the second Sunday after Pascha we'll hear about the Holy Myrrhbearers, the women who, along with Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, took Jesus down from the Cross, prepared His body and buried him. This teaches us that we should treat the bodies of the reposed with respect, that we should offer a dignified, Christian burial to those who have died. Following the Myrrhbearers' example, one important and meaningful way we show our respect for the dead is by attending their funerals and helping out in any way we can. Traditionally, when someone dies, people from the community or the parish bring food to the house of the deceased so that the grieving family won't have to concern themselves with cooking and havetime to properly grieve. Helping out in Church with singing, serving, or acting as pallbearers

when asked are wonderful ways of caring for the dead as well. Even just attending a Panakhyda or Funeral service and offering condolences to the family are meaningful acts and always appreciated. Sometimes people feel uncomfortable, because they're not sure what to say. Just saying "I'm sorry, accept my condolences," or even just holding someone's hand is enough. Your presence is more important than your words. We care for the dead prayerfully as well. Besides joining our personal prayers to the prayers of the Church at a funeral or memorial service, we remember our reposed family and friends in our daily prayers as well. The Church has set aside specific days and times (the third, ninth, and fortieth day after death as well as the yearly anniversaries; the Soul Saturdays during Lent, etc.) when we are encouraged to attend memorial services and pray for the deceased.

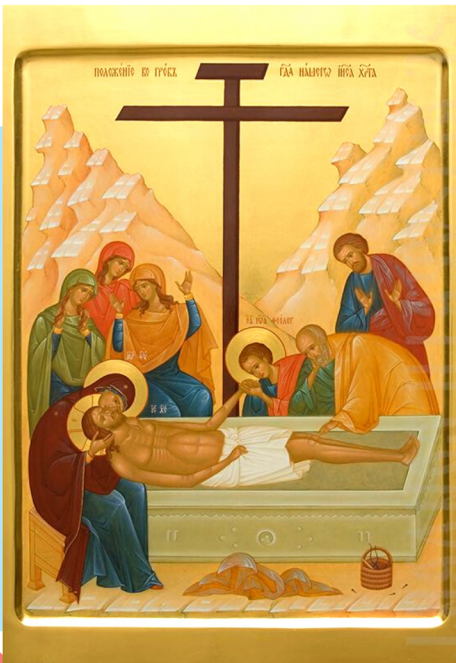


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A special word needs to be said about cemeteries. The word cemetery comes from the Greek koimiterio whose root-word is “to sleep.” We say that people are “resting” in the cemetery, awaiting the final judgement. This is why we care for the graves of our loved ones, making sure that they are clean, tidy, and perhaps decorated with flowers. We visit the graves of our loved ones and offer prayers on special days such as St. Thomas Sunday, Pentecost, or Memorial Day.



Sometimes people die who did not have children or relatives, or perhaps their family now lives far away, and it is a wonderful and loving Christian custom to look after the graves of these people and make sure that the memorial services are held for them as well. We sing Vichnaya Pamiat' – Eternal Memory at the end of every memorial service. This is a prayer that God will never forget the person who has died, and will always keep them in His mind and in His heart. When we do the same, keeping their memory alive in our own mind and heart, caring for them both practically and prayerfully, we perform a Godly, loving act. This month we celebrate Christ's victory over death. We will visit the graves of our departed relatives, friends, and fellow parishioners on St. Thomas Sunday, to pray that they, too, will experience a joyful resurrection. Make sure to take part in this beautiful custom whether you have relatives buried at the cemetery or not. If you know of people who have died but have no one to pray for them make sure to look after their grave and ask the priest to say a prayer for them as well. And throughout the year whenever a relative, friend, or fellow parishioner experiences the loss of a loved one attend the panakhyda or funeral and help out as you are able. We – each and every one of us – were created in God's image and likeness. In caring for the dead we show our love and care for one another – the most special and beloved of all God's creatures, in all God's creation.



The icon depicts Christ after he has been removed from the cross, lying supine, as his body is being prepared for burial. The scene is taken from the Gospel of John. Shown around him, and mourning his death, the Theotokos; John the beloved disciple; Joseph of Arimathea; and Mary Magdalene. Nicodemus and others may also be depicted. Often the Four Evangelists will be shown in the corners.

"For Thou are the Resurrection, the Life, and the Repose of Thy servants who have fallen asleep, O Christ our God, and unto Thee we ascribe glory, together with Thy Father, who is from everlasting, and Thine all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever unto ages of ages. Amen."

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Session Four – Teens



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Wrapping it Up! Soul-Care Suggestions:

Praxis – Living our Faith:

What can I do?

1. If you are able to sing learn to chant the memorial and funeral services or to sing in the choir. People only die once, and a beautifully sung, solemn and prayerful funeral is a fitting testament to a Christian life well lived, as well as a clear symbol of our love for them and for God.
2. If your parish has a cemetery volunteer to help keep it clean and tidy, and especially to make sure that it is well-tended and decorated with flowers for the St. Thomas Sunday, Pentecost, or Memorial Day services.
3. If you know of elderly parishioners or even distant family members who died but don't have anyone to look after their graves take this upon yourself. Make sure the grave is neat and tidy, and make sure to invite the priest to bless the grave when he visits the cemetery.
4. Participate in the Soul Saturday memorial services in Church; prepare kolachi or koliva to be offered on behalf of the reposed.
5. Whenever someone in the parish, a relative or the relative of a friend dies attend the memorial service or funeral.
6. Help out in Church during the funeral service by holding candles or the cross, acting as an usher or pallbearer, and/or help prepare or serve the food for the memorial luncheon afterwards.
7. Keep a memorial booklet with the names of your reposed loved ones, and remember them in your daily prayers..

