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The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Faith and Order

The Fifth Sunday of Zemene Tsom (*The Season of Lent*)

Liturgical Readings:

1 Thes. 4:13 – end; 2 Pet. 3: 7- 15; Acts 24: 1 -22

Psalm 50:3-4;

Mat. 24:1—36

The Anaphora of Saint Athanasious

Mount Olives

Beloved in Christ, today the Ethiopian Orthodox Church commemorates the sacred day known as Mount Olives, a name given by our holy Saint Yared. It is on this hallowed mountain that our Lord Jesus Christ revealed to His disciples the profound mysteries of the end of the world and the coming of Judgment Day. As we reflect upon the Scriptures, we are called to see Mount Olives not merely as a physical location, but as a divine stage upon which God’s plan for humanity unfolds, encompassing mercy, prophecy, judgment, and hope.

Mount Olives lies to the east of Jerusalem, overlooking the city and separated from Zerubbabel’s Temple by the deep Kidron Valley. Nearby is Bethphage, from where our Lord began His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the day we now commemorate as Hosanna. On that day, He descended the Mount, fulfilling ancient prophecy, and the multitudes cried, “Hosanna! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!” (Mark 11:1-11). At the foot of this sacred Mount is Gethsemane, where our Saviour prayed in anguish the night before His crucifixion, offering Himself as the Lamb for the sins of the world (Matthew 26:30-36). From this same Mount Olives, after His resurrection, He ascended into heaven, blessing His disciples as they watched in awe (Luke 24:52; Acts 1:12). The prophet Zechariah declares that on the day of Judgment, the Lord’s feet shall stand upon this very mountain, marking it as the appointed place of divine reckoning (Zechariah 14:4). It is in remembrance of this sacred significance that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church names the fifth week of Lent Mount Olives, and the Gospel appointed for this day is Matthew 24:1-36.

The Scriptures remind us that God’s ways have ever been revealed upon the mountains. Consider Mount Tabor, where the glory of God shone upon the disciples at the Transfiguration. Similarly, Mount Olives became the vantage point for Christ to teach His disciples the signs of the end times. As He left the Temple with His followers and turned towards Mount Olives, they pointed to the grandeur of Zerubbabel’s Temple, and our Lord solemnly declared that “not one stone here shall be left upon another” (Matthew 24:1-2). There, upon the Mount, He unfolded to them the events that would precede His coming. Many would rise claiming to be the Christ (Matthew 24:4-5), wars would break out, nations would rise against nations (Matthew 24:6-7), famine and earthquakes would afflict the earth (Matthew 24:7-8), Christians would be persecuted (Matthew 24:9), and iniquity would abound, with quarrels and falsehoods everywhere (Matthew 24:10-13). Yet, amidst this turmoil, the Gospel would be proclaimed throughout the world (Matthew 24:14), and the faithful are called to watch, for the abomination foretold by Daniel will appear (Matthew 24:15), and those within the city must flee to the mountains (Matthew 24:17-28). Christ then gave the parable of the fig tree: when its branch becomes tender and puts forth leaves, summer is near. This symbolises the restoration of Israel and the nearness of His second coming (Matthew 24:32).

The signs of the coming of the Son of Man remind us that all will be revealed: He will come with His angels, and all humanity will stand before Him for judgment. The righteous will be separated from the wicked, as described in Matthew 25:31-46, with the sinners on the left and the righteous on the right. To the righteous, the suffering will cease, tears will be wiped away, and their spiritual bodies will rise glorified, incorruptible, and perfected (Revelation 21:4; 1 Corinthians 15:42-45). They shall be taken up to meet the Lord in the air, welcomed into His heavenly presence (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), and they will behold the Lord face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12; Revelation 1:7; 22:4), transformed into His likeness (1 John 3:2). They shall partake of the Lamb's wedding feast (Revelation 19:8-9), inherit the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 25:34), dwell in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2-3), and receive their eternal reward (Revelation 22:12; Daniel 12:3; 2 Timothy 4:2-3; 1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Peter 5:4; Philippians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:19). They shall reside in houses not made by human hands (2 Corinthians 5:1-2; John 14:2-3), in a realm renewed and perfected, free from darkness, sorrow, or suffering (Revelation 22:5), and the name of the Saviour shall be inscribed upon their foreheads (Revelation 22:4). God Himself shall be their Father (Revelation 21:3-9).

The Old Testament bears witness to the faithful who sought refuge on mountains in times of trial. Recall King David, fleeing from Absalom, who ascended the mountains in deep anguish, trusting in God's providence (2 Samuel 15:30). Recall too the blind restored to sight, the sick healed even on the Sabbath, and the afflicted lifted from their beds. These miracles foreshadow the ultimate healing and resurrection of the righteous at the Last Day.

Christ's mission encompasses two great comings. In His first coming, He became one of us, born of the Virgin Mary, healing the sick, teaching with authority, suffering, being crucified, and then ascending into heaven. In His second coming, He shall return in glory to judge the living and the dead, to separate the righteous from the wicked, and to grant eternal life to His faithful. As the apostles teach, He came once to offer Himself as sacrifice, and He will come again to manifest His glory and justice (Hebrews 9:26-28).

Mount Olives, beloved, reminds us to be vigilant, to live in holiness, to uphold the truth of the Gospel, and to prepare our hearts for the day of the Lord. As the righteous are rewarded with eternal life, we are called to emulate Christ in our conduct, showing mercy, faith, and perseverance. Just as He ascended from Mount Olives in glory, so shall the faithful rise to meet Him, clothed in eternal splendour, dwelling forever in His light.

Glory to the Almighty God! Amen.