

Sunday of the Myrrhbearing Women

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christ is risen!

In each of the Sundays leading up to Pascha, the Sundays of Great Lent, the Church gives us themes and examples to contemplate during our preparation for the celebration of the Lord's Resurrection. If we recall, there were five Sundays and five themes:

In the Triumph of Orthodoxy we celebrated the restoration of the holy icons, and in doing so recalled that through Christ the divine image in each of us can be uncovered and refashioned, shining forth with the glory of God.

In the second Sunday, we celebrated the memory of St. Gregory Palamas, who taught us that for the image of God to shine forth from within, we need to enter not only into the stillness of the Lenten season, but also, and more importantly, we need to enter into the still of our own hearts and there encounter the Lord through prayer and repentance.

In the third Sunday, the Cross of the Lord was placed in the center of the church, as a reminder that the Cross is at the very heart of our lives, for through the Cross we die with Christ to the ways of sin and the ways of the world. And through the Cross we have the promise of the Resurrection, for we know that all who die with Christ will also rise with Him. And this is why we proclaim that through the Cross joy has come into the world.

And then in the last two Sundays of the Great Fast, the Church puts before us the examples of St. John of the Ladder and St. Mary of Egypt. The one through his writings describing each rung on the spiritual ladder which leads from earth to heaven; and the other through her life, climbing this ladder from the depths of human depravity to the heights of divine knowledge and experience.

And then just one week before Pascha, we found ourselves holding palm branches in our hands and crying out from our hearts, "Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord!" All the time knowing that the Lord was entering the holy city for nothing other than to offer Himself up on the Cross for each and every one of us.

Throughout the period of Great Lent we contemplated on these themes and examples, because these themes and examples were given to us to prepare us to experience the joy of the Lord's Resurrection from the dead. And in a marvelous and miraculous way, each of us in celebrating the Lord's Resurrectional victory, also by the grace of God experienced the joy of our own spiritual resurrection, the joy of our own victory over sin, death, and the devil – a victory which has been accomplished fully and most perfectly in Christ Himself, and a victory which Christ is accomplishing more fully and more perfectly within us each and every day.

And now, with the experience of Great Lent behind us, we find ourselves in the midst of the Paschal season – a season of great joy, festivity, and peace in celebration of the Lord’s victory over the world and everything which is fallen and corrupt.

Brothers and sisters, these are bright days, days in which we see not only the world in a new light, but also ourselves and each other. And in these days of festive brightness the Church puts before us special Sunday commemorations – commemorations which teach us, not how to prepare to celebrate the Lord’s Resurrection but commemorations which teach us how to make the most of the celebration which is underway – a celebration which began with the first discovery of the empty tomb and which continue to this day in the minds and hearts of all those who through Christ are experiencing their own resurrection to newness of life.

Last Sunday, we remembered how the Lord revealed Himself to His Apostles, both on the Sunday of His Resurrection and then one week later on the next Sunday; the second time the Apostle Thomas not only being in the midst of the other disciples but also exclaiming with them, “My Lord and my God!”

We saw how the Lord appeared to his disciples to show them that He had indeed risen from the dead, and that His Resurrection was bodily for that which is sown as a seed in the earth – that is the flesh – would also spring forth and blossom into new and incorruptible life.

And we also saw how Sunday became for the disciples, not only the day of the Resurrection, but also the day in which they would most perfectly experience the Lord’s presence in their midst, through the opening of the Scriptures and through the breaking of the bread, just as we also experience His presence through the proclamation of the Gospel and through the reception of His Most-pure Body and Blood in Holy Communion.

And today, on this third Sunday of Pascha, the Church calls to our remembrance the myrrhbearing women; those women who accompanied and served the Lord not only through His earthly ministry when He walked the earth teaching, healing, and preparing the people for entrance into His Kingdom, but also when He was lifted up from the earth, lifted up on the Cross to draw all men to Himself.

When the sun hid its rays, when the earth was shaken, when almost all the disciples fled, these women stood by the Cross of the Lord. Though they were fearful, they were also courageous; though they were sorrowful, they also were hopeful; though they saw others flee they remained loyal.

And for this, the Lord rewarded them. For their courage, hope, and loyalty, the Lord rewarded them with the privilege of being the first to hear the joyous proclamation from the angels, “He is not here. He is risen as He said!”

And then in a most marvelous way, the myrrhbearing women were commissioned by the angels and by the Lord Himself to be, as we sing in the hymns, apostles to the apostles;

for they were sent with the good news of the Lord's Resurrection to those who would later be sent from the Mount of Olives into the farthest corners of the universe so that every believing creature might be baptized and receive the newness of life which had shown forth from the tomb.

If last week, we saw the necessity of gathering each and every Sunday in the company of believers to witness to the Lord's Resurrection and to experience His presence among us, this week we should see with perfect certainty the fact that all those who fearlessly, courageously, and loyally stand by the Cross of the Lord become in due time witnesses to His Resurrection.

The closer we are to the Lord's Cross, through the difficulties of our lives, through the challenges we face, through the trials and misfortunes which we undergo, the more perfectly the angelic voice will resound in our souls, "The Lord is risen! He has slain death!" The more richly the Lord's peace will fill our hearts each time He visits us with the words, "Peace be to you" and "Be of good cheer, I have overcome of the world!"

This is the great mystery of the Church for through the Church, the Body of Christ, we have been initiated into the Lord's life, death, and resurrection. He lives within us and we live within Him – we share with Him and through Him with each other – the one life in Christ; we all have become co-travelers on the one journey – the one journey from death to life, from earth to heaven.

And we know this because we have felt the Lord's presence as He accompanies us on the road to Golgotha – the way of the Cross – we have experienced the fire of His divinity as He warms our hearts on the road to Emmaus explaining to us how it was necessary for Him and how it is necessary for us to enter through the Cross into glory. And He comes to us, like He did to His disciples, even through closed doors – even when the darkness of the world seems to have won, and He says to us, "Peace be to you... Receive the Holy Spirit... As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you." And when we hear these words in our hearts, we cannot help but bring the Good News of salvation to anyone who will receive it.

Brothers and sisters, let us like the Apostles, and like the myrrhbearing women before them, receive the word of the Lord's Resurrection with trembling and great joy, and let us take this Good News to those in need.

And let us celebrate not only these bright days of the Paschal season but also each and every day of our lives, especially the dark and difficult ones, with the assurance that the Tomb is empty for the Lord has risen, and let us be filled with assurance that with Himself the Lord is raising each and every one of us to newness of life and immortality in His Heavenly Kingdom!

Christ is risen!