

Date: April 29, 2023

CHRIST IS RISEN!

Subject: Sunday of the Myrrh-Bearing Women

The third Sunday of Pascha is dedicated to the Myrrh-Bearing Women. Our congratulations to all women who work in our churches, as this Sunday is dedicated to you. Nor let us forget about the men whose memory is also celebrated today. They are Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus, a secret follower of Jesus Christ. Joseph fearlessly approached Pilate for Jesus' body, took it down from the cross with Nicodemus, and buried it in a new tomb that he had prepared for his own future burial.

MARK 15: 43-16: 8

Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus.

And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead.

And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph.

And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre.

And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid.

And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.

And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?

And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.

But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.

It probably may surprise people, especially those who like to accuse the Christian Church of being anti-women, to find out who was chosen by the Savior to receive His very first appearance after His resurrection. No, it was not the apostles. It was a group of women. Why did Jesus chose them over everyone else? Because of the great love and devotion that they had for Him.

It would be of great benefit to us to stop and examine how these women loved the Savior so much that it earned them this great honor. The world teaches us a very distorted form of love. But if we examine the way that these women loved, we will see a powerful expression of what true love really is. Therefore, let us start.

These women had a completely selfless form of love. They quietly stayed in the background and made no external show of their love. We hear nothing about them until Jesus was suffering on the cross. Unlike the apostles, they never argued amongst themselves as to who in their group was the most important one. They simply, quietly followed Jesus as He traveled, taking care of His needs as well as the needs of the apostles. And they expected no pay for their work or even to be reimbursed for expenses, but paid for all expenses with their own money.

They proved to be faithful to Jesus to the bitter end, never abandoning Him like the apostles and others did. This is a tragedy that we so often see. When a prominent individual falls into deep trouble, all people close to him abandon him to face his trouble by himself. It is so rare to have a true friend who will not run away, but will remain faithful through thick and thin. This the apostles did not do. They abandoned Jesus and went into hiding.

The myrrh-bearing women did not. They stayed at the cross, despite being surrounded by a mob who had been stirred up to an irrational and threatening condition by the Savior's enemies. After Jesus died, they watched as His body was taken down from the cross and buried. Grieving that they had been unable to anoint His body with myrrh, as was the customary thing to do at that time, they bought myrrh and planned to come back to the tomb at the earliest possible time.

They did not let fear for their own safety stop them. They understood how dangerous it was to be associated with a condemned "criminal". Nonetheless, at the end of the Paschal celebration, they got up while it was still dark, to go to the tomb and honor the Body with myrrh in the way that it should have been before it was buried. Their knowledge that they were too weak to move away the stone that covered the entrance to the tomb did not deter them. Their faith was so strong that they knew that one way or another, they would be able to enter into the tomb.

What the women did for Jesus teaches us profoundly what true, selfless, self-sacrificing love is. How could the Savior fail to reward them by not appearing first to them!

The way that these women loved the Savior shatters into a million tiny specks all the self-serving, selfish, self-centered teachings that the world offers about what it means to love. The two men that are remembered on this day also demonstrated this love. And what is truly encouraging to us, they openly exhibited it only after Jesus had died. They show us that it is possible to change at any time from being a selfish person, concerned with pleasing mainly himself, to a person who has the moral and spiritual will to love others with a divine love.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this Gospel reading should not just edify us. It can do so much more, if we allow it. May it inspire us to become similar to the people described on these pages. We can see how grateful the Savior is to people who show their love to Him. And His loving heart is large enough to fit in it every single person that has ever lived, is alive at this time, and those not yet born.

So why then do we find ourselves still on the outside? Is it because we continue to love according to the values taught by the world? Well, we can change that. And the two men whose memory we remember today convincingly showed us that it is never too late to do what we can to gain entry into the Savior's heart. Therefore, let us start to change the manner in which we show love from the worldly way to the way of the myrrh-bearing women. Yes, the world will not change overnight. But if we start, each one of us will without doubt inspire at least one more person, probably more than one.

Then these people in their turn will inspire one or more persons. Before long, we will see a groundswell of change. And seeing our sincere effort, God will increase the strength and growth of the groundswell. And to reward us, He will find a warm and blessed spot in His heart that will be ours forever.

What are we waiting for?

With much love in Christ,

Archpriest Serge Kotar