

**THIRD SUNDAY OF PASCHA
(SUNDAY OF THE HOLY MYRRH-BEARING WOMEN)
APRIL 9/ 22, 2007**

ACTS 6:1-7

ST. MARK 15:43-16.8

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel: *Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counselor, which also waited for the Kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the Body of Jesus.*

And Pilate marveled 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 of 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.

...

St. Maximos the Confessor:

61. The Lord's tomb stands equally either for this world or for the heart of each faithful Christian. The linen clothes are the inner essences of sensible things together with their qualities of goodness. The napkin is the simple and homogenous knowledge of intelligible realities, together with the vision of God, in so far as it is granted. Through these things the Logos is initially recognised, for without them any higher apprehension of what He is would be altogether beyond our capacity.
62. Those who bury the Lord with honour will also see Him risen with glory, but He is not seen by anyone else. For He can no longer be apprehended by His enemies as he does not wear those outer coverings through which He seemed to let Himself be captured by those who sought Him, and in which He endured suffering for the salvation of all.
63. He who buries the Lord with honour is revered by all who love God. For he has not allowed the Lord's Body, nailed to the Cross, to be left exposed to the blasphemy of unbelievers, but has befittingly delivered Him from derision and insult...

[St. Maximos the Confessor in *The Philokalia Volume Two* (compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth) (tr from the Greek and edited by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard Kallistos Ware), Faber and Faber, London, 1981, paperback edition first published 1990, p. 126.]

The Courageous Joseph

The blessed Joseph of Arimathea, rich, prominent, member of the Jewish Council, strode boldly into Pilate asking for the Lord's Body. This act by Joseph, who had been a secret disciple, is particularly courageous when we contrast his visible strength with the fear and terror evinced by His disciples who had simply run off. Joseph rose to the occasion:

This man, so noble, honourable, pious and virtuous, did not say to himself: I am rich and famous, but if I ask for the Body of Christ, One condemned to torture and crucified, I shall fall from my fame and wealth, and shall lose my honour; I shall be maligned by the Jews, and shall be expelled from the synagogue.¹

Joseph's Noble Increasing Virtue

Pilate released the Body to the noble Joseph, who took down the Body from the "Tree" and wrapped It in a shroud he had purchased for this purpose. Nicodemus, another of Christ's disciples, and he "buried the precious most pure Body of the Master with reverent awe".² Joseph's courageous and reverential burying of the Lord in the 'rock tomb' and rolling the stone over the entrance reflected his virtue and exemplified his good works.³

Applying Joseph's Virtuous Act

We can learn from Joseph's virtuous act. We must take the Lord's Body through the Holy Eucharist, place It in our souls in never-ending remembrance of God:

And let us take the Body of Jesus, through Holy Communion, and place it in a tomb hewn out of a rock, that is, place It within a soul which always remembers God and does not forget Him. And let the soul be hewn from a rock, that is, from Christ Who is the Rock on which we are established.⁴

Why Were the Women First at His Tomb?

It was necessary that the women be first at the tomb. The Lord chose them to see and know where He was laid so they "might tell the disciples, and bring them the joyous good tidings of the Resurrection".⁵ This was only fitting: woman had incurred condemnation in paradise through the serpent's deceit so now she receives and sees *first* the good news of the risen Lord.

Notice that those who remained close to the tomb "were women who had followed (Jesus) in Galilee; among them, the most fervent were Mary Magdalene, the Mother of the Lord, who is called Mary of James, and Salome, the mother of the sons of Zebedee".⁶

These women showed their great dedication, courage and patience at the time of the Passion and Burial of Christ.⁷

See their strength of commitment to the Lord! The disciples who Christ had loved and known ran from Him; yet, these brave women remained close by. They had prepared sweet spices with which to anoint Him as was Jewish custom. This was done to preserve the body and arrest its decay.⁸

The Angel Frees Them From Their Fears

Through the angel, the Lord said Don't be afraid, you seek the crucified Jesus, who *is* risen! He isn't here – see He is not lying where they laid him! The “angel had rolled away the stone, so as to show them (the place)”.⁹

Go Your Way – Tell the Disciples

He commands them to go and tell the disciples and Peter that he is risen and goes before them to Galilee where they will see Him. The Lord, through the angel, directs them to Galilee away from the Jews “to free them from all fear and agitation”.¹⁰ He names Peter, the foremost of the Twelve, separately to give assurance to him that his denial of Christ had not ‘disqualified’ him from discipleship.¹¹ In this way, Peter could not say “I denied the Lord, and therefore I am no longer His disciple. He has rejected me and abhors me.”¹²

The women were afraid, not only because of the Jews but also of what they had seen – no Body in the tomb and the angel's command – the “awesome mystery of the Resurrection”!¹³ The ‘awesomeness’ of the Event even caused them to forget the angel's command to them.¹⁴

Let us now go *our* way carrying and preaching the glorious news of Christ's Resurrection, giving thanks to our Lord, Who suffered, was buried and rescued us from the evil one and “became the Mediator of our resurrection”¹⁵. Because Christ voluntarily gave Himself on the Cross for us, please Him “through a pure faith, good works, repentance and confession”!¹⁶ If we sin, as we will, know that Christ chastises us, not with the intention of destroying but rather correcting our behaviour. We hold the key to salvation within our hearts:

It is in our power to choose our salvation *or* (emphasis supplied)
our ruin.¹⁷

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Hieromonk German Ciuba (tr. from the Slavonic into English; tr. from the original Greek into Slavonic in the year 6851, A.D. 1343), *The Gospel Commentary*, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, p. 174 and also see Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Mark, Vol. II* in the series, Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the New Testament* (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1993, 2nd Printing 1997, p. 138.

² Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

³ *id.*

⁴ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

⁵ Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

⁶ *id.*

⁷ *id.*

⁸ *id.*, pp. 176-177 and Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

⁹ *id.*, p. 141 and Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

¹⁰ *id.*, p. 178.

¹¹ *id.* and see Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

¹² *id.*

¹³ *id.* and Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

¹⁴ *id.*, and Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-142.

¹⁵ Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

¹⁶ *id.*

¹⁷ *id.*, pp. 179-180.