



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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The Myrrbearing Women: Holy and Unlauded Heroes May 3, 2020

Christ is risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

To the Myrrbearing Women at the sepulcher an Angel appeared and cried: Myrrh is fit for the dead, but Christ has shown Himself a Stranger to corruption. So cry: The Lord has risen, granting to the world great mercy.

(Troparion for the Sunday of the Holy Myrrbearing Women)

Every morning and evening when I tune in the depressing news about the continued expansion of COVID-19 in Pennsylvania, there is inevitably a report on the heroes on the front lines of the battle. Doctors, nurses, caregivers, scientists – all of whom are practicing their vocations and putting their lives in many cases on the line to help and to save those afflicted with the terrible virus. These are the true heroes of the battle, the newscasters often remark. And who could disagree? They go to work in hospitals and nursing homes without proper protection because of government officials who want to feather their own nests and their own chances at reelection without any regard for those who are in such dire need. Those who work on the front lines, particularly in such hard-hit places such as New York City, Philly and other big cities,

are true heroes indeed. We must care for them any way we can; we must pray for them; and, we must urge our government officials to stop serving themselves and provide the protection these medical heroes need so desperately.

On this Third Sunday of Pascha, however, we recognize a different kind of hero. I call them “unlauded” and “normal.” They are *unlauded*, because we recognize them so very infrequently; they are *normal* in the sense that a true, practicing, unhypocritical believer is normal – normal in the sense that they are a vital part of the Body of Christ – not as recognizable as the head or the heart, perhaps, but just as necessary and important as they go about their normal and unlauded lives of service.

The normal and unlauded heroes of the day for this Third Sunday of Pascha are the Holy Myrrhbearers, specifically the Holy Myrrhbearing Women. When we look up the stories of their lives we get a somewhat disjointed and incomplete picture. Some of their names are inconsistently reported in the four Gospels. Some were wealthy, some poor; some were mothers, others not; some were married, others virgins. We don’t always know the details. But we do know that they did what they could do out of love for the Lord Jesus Christ. They rose early on Sunday morning, the first day, the first workday of the week, bought spices and balms and went to anoint the dead body of Jesus, in other words to do what was done in the first century to embalm a dead body. The Holy Apostles could not go. They were in hiding for a very good reason. If they had been out and about, they too would most likely have been rounded up and arrested, put on trial, and perhaps killed. When Jesus appears among them behind locked doors, He does not chastise them, but instead greets them with the Hebrew “Shalom,” or “Peace be with you!” He breathes on them and imparts the first gift of the Holy Spirit, He that proceeds from the Father. The Holy Apostles thus became the first leaders of the Body, the Church. They did their part as directed by the Lord. And so did the Holy Myrrhbearing Women. They too did their parts. They ministered in love to the Lord out of love for Him.

We remember them on this Third Sunday in Pascha and give thanks for their example. And let’s take away from their example two lessons: **First**, let each of us, like them, do our part without fanfare or announcement or without seeking credit. Let us, like them, minister to the Lord by ministering to one another. Let us lead by example. Let us care for others in this crisis by waiting in patience, without complaint, for an end to our shelter in place, by wearing masks to protect others around us, by doing what we can at home to make life bearable and joyful for those with whom we live and with whom many of us work as well. Like the Holy Myrrhbearing Women, let us lead by example! **Second**, let us remember that the Holy Myrrhbearers did what they did for the same reason that the Holy Apostles did what they did as well – out of love for Jesus Christ. How do we become the kind of people who do what we do out of love for Christ? The same way they did: by knowing Him, by hearing Him, by maintaining and perfecting our

relationship with Him. To know Jesus Christ is to love Him, for He loves us with a perfect and unconditional love. St. John says this in one of the most important passages in all of Scripture, I John 4:19, "We love, because He first loved us."

All of Christianity, the witness of the entire corpus of Scripture and the entire writings of the Holy Fathers begins with this simple premise: We love, because He first loved us. Every action, every true Christian vocation, every example is one of love, because of the love of Jesus Christ. His love, St. Paul said, constrains us, motivates us, guides us, empowers us, leads us to love others. So that, you see, is the example of the Holy Myrrhbearing women as well. What they show us is the simple, unlauded, straightforward path of service in everyday actions, done without seeking attention or recognition, for the love of Christ. And what their love of Christ shows us is that He, the Lord Jesus Christ, is absolutely worthy of our love for Him, and that it is only through and because of Him and His love for us that we can and must love and serve our neighbor in need.

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Fr. Elias

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