04/05/2020

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for the Sunday of the Myrrh-Bearing Women



Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! [and in response: Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!]

Christ is Risen! [and in response: Truly He is Risen!]

I have one question for all of us this morning. One question, and one question alone.

Τίς ἀποκυλίσει ἡμῖν τὸν λίθον;

Who will roll away the stone for us?[*]

Who will roll away the sorrow of these times, which have shut us in living tombs of isolation and loneliness?

Who will roll away the angst, the worry, and the fear that imprison our minds and hearts day to day?

Who will roll away the burden, the onus, the pressure of the needs we have to meet and the families we have to support?

My Beloved Christians of the Holy Trinity Church in New Rochelle, our courageous parish at one of the early epicenters of the Pandemic, and all of you joining by virtual means, the question is: “Who will roll away the stone for us?”

The Faithful Myrrh-Bearers arrived at the Tomb in the deep dawn, to complete their mission of anointing the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ in accordance with the prevailing Jewish custom, but they did not prevail, for He had risen from the dead.

They were led by Mary Magdalene, from whom Christ had cast out seven demons. There was Salome, a daughter of Saint Joseph the Betrothed. Salome was the wife of the fisherman Zebedee and the mother of the Disciples, John the Evangelist and James. There was Joanna, the wife of Chuza, who was the steward of King Herod’s household. There was Susanna, and Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus. And there was Mary, the wife of Cleopas who encountered the Risen Lord on the Road to Emmaus.

The Women Disciples of the Lord were many, and they demonstrated a faith and commitment to Him in His earthly life that His Disciples could not.

Last Sunday, we witnessed the fear of the Disciples, hiding in the Upper Room behind locked doors, afraid of the Temple Authorities. And we saw how the Lord transformed their fear into peace, and the disbelief of Thomas into faith.

Today, we behold the devotion of the Myrrh-Bearers, whose love is mirrored by that of Nikodemos and Joseph of Arimathea, for together they took down the Precious Body of the Lord from the Cross, wrapped It in linen with spices, and laid It in the Tomb.

But they did not realize that even in death, the Body of the Lord was life-giving. For the Logos of God was never separated from His human soul or His human body.

They did not realize that He would not be inside the Tomb, waiting to be anointed, since His anointing had been accomplished before His Passion.

Indeed, my beloved Christians, they worried about the stone, for they did not as yet understand that:

… neither death nor life, nor Angels, nor Principalities nor Powers, nor things present, nor things future, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord![†]

Not anything – certainly, not a stone! So what is the answer to our question today?

Perhaps our question is not phrased correctly. It is not: “Who will roll away the stone?” It is: “Why is the stone already rolled away?”

It is not about the weight of our grief, our isolation, our sadness, our fears, and our suffering. These are unavoidable; but we are not called not to focus this impossible weight.

My dear Brothers and Sisters, the stone was rolled away not to let the Lord out, but to let us in.

There is only one way to the Resurrection, and it is through the Cross, through the Tomb, through following our Lord Jesus Christ all the way to the end. It is when we choose to enter into the full experience of the Lord’s Θεανθρωπότης, His God-Manhood, that we begin to understand what it is to die to ourselves and to live to Him.

What it is to live for others;

To live for love, for mercy, for compassion, and forgiveness;

To choose the good of everyone else above our own.

This is dying before you die, as the Monks of Mount Athos know so well:

Ἄν πεθάνεις πρίν πεθάνεις,

Δέν θά πεθάνεις ὅταν πεθάνεις.

“If you die before you die,

You will not die when you die.” [‡]

It is a willing choice, the same choice that led our Lord to die for us on the Cross. He willingly chose to die, as the Virgin so lovingly laments in the Holy Friday Homily of St. Symeon Metaphrastes:

“So now let Your head sleep, my beloved Son, and let Your hands and Your feet rest. Others bow their heads in death, but not before they give up the spirit. But You bowed Your head, commanding death to come; only then did You give over Your spirit.”[§]

Therefore, my beloved Christians, even in the midst of the suffering and hardship that surrounds us daily, let us cast our cares upon the Lord for He cares for us.[**]

The stone will be moved – even if God must send His Angels from heaven to do so!

And let us enter the Empty Tomb, a sure sign of the Resurrection and life eternal, that we may embrace a life of self-sacrifice, of altruism, of empathy, of compassion and above all love.

Then we may join those Myrrh-Bearers – those Apostles to the Apostles – and run to announce the glad tidings that:

Ἠγέρθη ὁ Κύριος ὄντως!

The Lord is risen indeed![††]

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! [Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!]

[*] Mark 16:3.

[†] Romans 8:38,39.

[‡] Inscription at St. Paul’s Monastery on Mount Athos.

[§] Cf. John 19:30. On the Lament of the All-Holy Theotokos When She Embraced the Precious Body of our Lord Jesus, Saint Symeon the Metaphrast, Archbishop of Thessaloniki (P.G. 114, 217A)

[**] Cf. I Peter 5:7.

[††] Luke 24:34.

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