

Sunday of Holy Myrrhbearing Women (3rd after Pascha)



This Sunday the church services are taken from the contents of the Gospel narration about the appearance of the risen Lord to the Myrrhbearing women. This all-joyful appearance of the Lord was the first after His rising from the grave and consequently it is glorified by the Church at the present time as the undoubted proof of His resurrection. Among the Myrrhbearers mentioned in the Gospel are the following: Mary Magdalene (Jul. 22), Mary Cleopas or James (May 23), Salome (3 Aug.), Johanna (Jun. 27), Martha and Mary, sisters of Lazarus (Jun. 4, Mar. 18) and Susanna (see Lk. 8:3; she is not mentioned in the Menologion). Besides these seven Myrrhbearing women, "there were also others, very many others, who served Christ and His disciples out of their means". The Holy Myrrhbearing Women and the circumstance of the appearance of the risen Lord to them are glorified in the stichera and troparia of the Canon for the third Sunday after Pascha and on all the days of this week and consequently it is called the Sunday of the Myrrhbearing Women¹.

Besides the Holy Myrrhbearers, the church hymns glorify Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, the secret disciples of the Savior on this present Sunday². According to the explanation of the Synaxarion, the Holy Women Myrrhbearers were "the first to truthfully bear witness to the Resurrection, Joseph and Nicodemus to the burial, but this is the most important and best kept of our teachings. This is the reason that they are the true witnesses of the burial together with the women, who have seen the Resurrection, and it was established to celebrate them after the first verification of Thomas, which came before because it happened in eight days as the holy evangelist said".

Calling its children on this day to praise "the wonderful Joseph together with Nicodemus, and the faithful Myrrhbearers", the Holy Church in the hymns for this day mainly glorifies our Lord Jesus Christ, inspiring us thus, that He should always be the first, the primary subject of commemoration and glorification for us. As the Holy Myrrhbearers were witnesses not only of the resurrection of the Savior, but also His suffering, death and burial so the Holy Church in its hymns will also remember the "passions" of the Savior and, turning to Him, sings: "You were smitten for our sake, and You were spat upon by lawless men, O Jesus", "You were given vinegar and gall to drink for our sake, O Savior", "You were pierced in the life-creating side with a spear", "You were counted among the dead", "You were placed in the tomb".

But this sorrowful memory of the suffering and death of the Savior will abundantly dissipate together with the comforting instruction on saving the fruits of the cross of the Savior for us and in the joy of His resurrection. The Holy Church exclaims, "O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? It was destroyed by the enlivening Rising from the dead"; "Let Zion be glad, also let heaven rejoice, Christ is risen, having raised up the dead". Even the troparia of this Sunday ("The Noble Joseph", "The angels came to the Myrrh-bearing women"),

are taken from the service of Great Saturday where they mainly expressed pious grief and only a hint of the celebration, but on this Sunday they also are supplemented with the joyful instruction of the accomplishment of the resurrection of the Savior (see the endings of these troparia below). Through such comparison of sorrowful and joyful commemorations in the church hymns of this day the spiritual situation of the holy women, who received the Savior after the resurrection is shaded with special power "instead of weeping the unspeakable joy"³, but equally this "unspeakable joy" of the resurrection of Christ, "who has illumined all the ends of the world is more deeply imprinted in our hearts".

Troparion, tone 2: When Thou didst descend to death, see page 553.

"Glory":

**The Noble Joseph,
When he had taken down Thine Immaculate Body from the tree,
Wrapped it in fine linen and anointed it with spices,
And placed it in a new tomb.
But Thou didst rise on the third day, O Lord,
Granting the world great mercy.**

"Both now and ever":

**The angel came to the Myrrhbearing woman at the tomb and said:
Myrrh is meet for the dead;
But Christ has shown Himself a stranger to corruption.
So proclaim: the Lord is risen,
Granting the world great mercy.**

Kontakion, tone 2

**Thou didst command the Myrrhbearers to rejoice;
Thou didst stop the lamentation of the first mother Eve by Thy resurrection;
O Christ God: Thou didst command Thine Apostles to preach:
The Savior is risen from the tomb.**

Magnification

**We magnify you,
Holy myrrh-bearing women,
And we honor your memory:
For you pray to Christ our God for us.**

Matins: 3rd Resurrection Gospel. **Epistle:** Acts 6:1-7; sel. 16. **Gospel:** Mk. 15: 43-47, 16:1-8; sel. 69-70.

At Sunday and Friday Vespers and in Wednesday Matins we sing the Aposticha: "O Thou, Who putttest on light as a garment". Refer to the Ustav [Typikon] for the case when the temple is consecrated to the Holy Myrrhbearing Women.

In the three weeks following the Sunday of the Holy Myrrhbearing Women, both the resurrection of Christ and some instances of Gospel history in which the divine might of Jesus Christ as the Messiah are with special clarity opened to the people are glorified in the church services so that seeing His acts they should believe in the resurrection of Christ.

¹The diligence of the Holy Myrrhbearing Women is truly great and their fervent love for the Lord is constant. Free from every earthly predilection their hearts lived and breathed only for the Lord: all their thoughts, desires and hope were concentrated in Him and all their blessings and treasure consisted in Him. For the sake of their beloved Teacher they willingly leave their homes, their close and known relatives, forget the weakness of their gender, are not frightened by the cruelty of the numerous enemies of the Lord, steadily follow Him everywhere, long-sufferingly pass through the cities and villages with Him and minister to Him from their means. They do not abandon their beloved Teacher during His suffering and His death. Trailing behind with love, they accompany the Lord also to Golgotha and they look upon the Crucified One, taking measure of the compassionate feeling of His extreme suffering. Having disdained all the dangers of the frantic enemies of Christ, they finally come nearer, to His very cross and by their participation ease the unquenchable grief and illness of His All-pure Mother. Having fervently served the Lord with their means during His lifetime, they do not stop serving Him even after His death. According to their internal burning love of their Divine Teacher they will zealously render Him the final burial honor: the anointing of His body with aromatic spices (Mk. 15:40, 47, 16:1-2; Mt. 27:55; Lk. 23:28-31, 49-56, 24:1; Jn. 19:25). In a holy impulse to see and to visit the tomb of the Lord they forget about themselves, about their need for rest, do not remember the obstacles and dangers, and even the weakness of their gender does not stop them. Such is the true love of the holy women for the Lord. It is continual, pure and simple, deep and strong. The burning continual love, the sincerest unquenched diligence of the holy women was worthily rewarded by the Lord Himself. The Holy Myrrhbearing Women, who preceded every one to the tomb of the Lord, also went before everyone in the joy of the Resurrection (Mt. 28:1-10; Mk. 16:6; Lk. 24:1-11). From this time the holy women have become true witnesses equally with Holy Apostles to the resurrection of Christ for all the people.

The ardor and continual love of the Holy Myrrbearers for the Lord also serves as an example for our love for Him. By the example of the holy women, we also should strengthen in our hearts the true self-denying love for our Savior. Even the strength of our love for Him should be like those, as the holy Apostle says, that nothing could separate us from Him, neither things present nor things to come, neither life nor death, neither angels nor men (Rom. 8:38-39). Besides this, in the example of the Holy Myrrhbearing Women the Holy Church presents a spiritual healing for all Christians tempted with sorrows, leading to depression. Like the holy women, wounded with fierce grief during the scene of their Lord and Savior, crucified on the cross and buried in a tomb, however searched for unique comfort in that tomb where all their happiness and life were hidden and found this desired comfort, so it is that each Christian soul should seek consolation in the sorrows and grief at the tomb and cross of the Savior.

Together with this, the life and labors of the Holy Myrrhbearing Women themselves represent an example of the true-Christian pursuit of the Christian woman. Her calling on earth is that this is according to privilege a life of the heart in all its lawful displays. An example of the Holy Myrrbearers and the contemporary Christian woman is likewise called to serve the indigent from their means, to ease the situation of the disabled by their labor, comfort the sorrowful and the sick and, to care "not for the beauty of the body, not for the external braiding of the hair, not about gold finery and elegance in clothes, but about the secret heart of the person in the incorruptible beauty of the gentle and taciturn spirit, that is precious before God" (1 Pet. 3:3-4; 1 Tim. 2:9-12), i.e. about the development and improvement in the Christian spirit of internal spiritual qualities, especially of the good and loving heart (See Rukovodstvo dlia Seljskikh Pastirej (Manual for Village Pastors) 1892, 15; Smolenskiia Eparkhialniia Vestnik (Smolensk Diocesan Messenger), 1891, 9).

² Nicodemus, as they say in the Synaxarion of the present Sunday, was immediately expelled from the synagogue, not agreeing to be of one mind with the Judeans, and Joseph after the burial of the body of the Lord was

thrown into a pit by the Judeans, but was delivered from it by divine power and went back to his estate in Arimathea. And the risen Christ appeared to him when he was tied in bonds, and by this even more firmly strengthens the mystery of His resurrection. Not looking at this, Joseph was to endure many persecutions on the part of the Judeans, but he could not keep silent about this mystery and boldly informed everyone of the past events. However, they say that the above-noted Nicodemus was the first to proclaim in detail what had occurred during the suffering and resurrection of Christ, completely knowing, as a member of the synagogue, the plots and negotiations of the Judeans, and in general everything (Sankt-Peterburgskii Dukhovnyi Vestnik (St. Petersburg Theological Messenger, 1895, 15).

³Added to the Resurrection Matins Canon are Troparia and Theotokion of the Paschal Canon, which sing of the wonder of the resurrection of Christ, but paying attention to the person of the Mother of God, (sung during the days of the Paschal week, except for the first and during the following Paschal days, except for Thomas Sunday, up to the Ascension of the Lord), appear on the Sunday of the Myrrhbearing Women as a deliberate feature of the divine services, wherefore from here, apparently from the church Ustav [Typikon], are also borrowed from other services and, concluding the general paschal Canon by itself, precedes the hymns in honor of the Holy Myrrbearers. It is clear that taking part in the joy of the Myrrbearers, the Holy Church counts as its duty to first greet Him to Which heart she is the closest with this joy. (Rukovodstvo dlia Seljskikh Pastirej (Manual for Village Pastors) 1892, 15).

*S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900), p 0589-0591.
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