

Saint Mary's Romanian Orthodox Church

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May 3rd 2020 - Bulletin Christ is Risen!

***Sunday, May 3rd -3rd Sunday after Pascha (Myrrhbearing Women). Epis. Acts
6:1-7. Gos. Mark 15:43-47, 16:1-8. Tone 2. Mat. Gos. 4.***

Mark 16:9-20 (3rd Matins Gospel)

Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe. After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country. And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either. Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will

lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen.

Acts 6:1-7 (Epistle)

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Holy Liturgy Gospel,

Mark 15:43-16:8 (Gospel)

Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James observed where He was laid. Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, “Who will roll away the stone from the

door of the tomb for us?” But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away – for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples – and Peter – that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.” So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Sermon by Father Philip LeMasters

I have known people who have been troubled by the question of whether God is primarily characterized by human standards of love or justice. Some of them have worried that a God of love would simply overlook evil and hold no one accountable for their actions. Others have reacted against the view that God is primarily a harsh judge Who is out to get us and to make sure that we pay our pound of flesh for our sins. Those with time to spare can have a debate about such abstract matters, as though God were a math problem that needed solving. But as Orthodox Christians, our focus must be different, for we humbly embrace God’s truth not as a speculative idea, but in the Person of Jesus Christ. He is not a bundle of competing definitions according to the standards of our limited minds, but the Son of God Who became fully human in order to save us out of a divine compassion beyond our understanding. He lowered Himself, taking on the form of a servant to the point of death on the Cross, burial in a tomb, and descent into Hades in order to rise triumphantly over them in His glorious resurrection on the third day. And He did not do so for His own sake, but for ours. In Him, we encounter not merely the best human aspirations, but truly the Lord Himself Who alone is Holy, Holy, Holy. What does it look like when the Alpha and the Omega of the universe becomes one of us, living in our corrupt world of sin, death, and personal brokenness? In today’s gospel text, we have a clear picture of what it means for the Word to become flesh and dwell among us. It means that He gives life to the dead and joy and comfort to those who mourn. Christ had compassion on the widow who had lost her only son. He consoled her, saying “Do not weep,” and then touched the coffin, bringing the young man back from death itself.

The Lord's great act of mercy for this woman is a sign or enacted icon of our salvation. For we weep and mourn not only for loved ones whom we see no more, but also for how our own sins, and those of others, have broken, marred, and distorted the beauty of our world, of our souls, of our relationships, and of every dimension of our life. Death, destruction, hatred, fear, and decay in all their forms are the consequences of our refusal to live faithfully as those created in the image and likeness of God. We have worshipped ourselves, our possessions and our pride, and found only despair and emptiness as a result, as well as slavery to our own self-centered desires. So we weep with the widow of Nain both for losing loved ones and for losing ourselves. The good news of the Gospel, however, is the unfathomable compassion of our Savior. Rather than simply observing human suffering and letting us bear the consequences of our actions, the Father sent the Son to enter into our suffering, into our distorted and disintegrated world, in order to restore us to the blessedness for which He created us. He came to heal us, to stop us from weeping, and even to raise us from the dead into the glory of the heavenly kingdom. He came to unite us to Himself in holiness. The Son touched the coffin of the dead man and he arose. Christ's compassion for us is so profound that He also entered a coffin, a tomb, and even descended to Hades, the shadowy place of the dead because, out of love for humankind, He could not simply stand by and allow us to bear the full consequences of our actions. No, our faith is not fundamentally about punishment or wrath for sinners. It is not focused on the bad news that we get what we deserve. Instead, we celebrate the good news of the infinite, holy mercy of Christ Who will stop at nothing to bring the one lost sheep back into the fold, Who is not embarrassed to welcome home the prodigal son, and Who will even submit to death on a cross in order to destroy it by rising in glory. Of course, we have our part to play in responding to His great compassion. If we identify ourselves with Jesus Christ, if we are members of His Body, the Church, and are nourished by His Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist, then His mercy must become evident in our lives. If we are partakers of the divine nature in Him, then His life must become ours such that, as St. Paul teaches, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." (Gal. 2:2) If we claim to receive Christ's compassion, then we must extend that same compassion to others, suffering with them in love, sharing their burdens as best we can, and going out of our way to show them the mercy that we have found in our Lord. If we are to live the Christian life with integrity, we too must have the courage to relate to others with true compassion as they suffer, mourn, and live with pain and disorder of whatever

kind. Perhaps they brought some of these conditions upon themselves. Like the rest of us, they have not always done the right thing and have suffered the consequences of their own bad choices. In some cases, they may actually believe that what they are doing is good. In other words, they are a lot like you and me. Instead of doing the easy and self-righteous thing by simply leaving them to their allegedly well-deserved misery, we must follow the way of our Lord, Who did not come to show mercy upon those who deserved it. Remember that mercy and grace, by definition, are not deserved. The widow of Nain and her dead son did not deserve the compassion of the Lord, but He showed love to them anyway. The relevance for our lives should be clear. If we have integrity as Christians, we will respond to others with the same compassion that we have experienced in Jesus Christ.

But we need to be clear: Extending Christ's compassion to others is not the same thing as being what our culture calls "a nice person" or making sure that everyone likes us or that we always tell people what they want to hear. It took discipline, strength, and courage for the Lord to show compassion throughout His entire earthly ministry, especially during His journey to the Cross. And every time that He healed the sick or raised the dead, He knew that the Pharisees and perhaps the Romans were watching, noticing Him as a threat to their power. He offended them virtually every step of the way with what He said and did. If we live and speak with holy compassion, we can be sure that some will take offense and think that we are crazy or even dangerous. To be His disciple is not a calling for cowards afraid of their own shadow or for people addicted to the praise of others, for it requires discipline, self-control, and a strength of character beyond our own power. It requires a willingness to be out of step with the dominant ways of the world, whatever they may be in a given time and place.

Unfortunately, it has become second nature to defend our egos by damning others, by building ourselves up as we put others down. Thank God, that is not way of our Lord. If it were, we would have no hope for salvation. If it were, the dead would be left in the tombs and the mourners would sorrow alone. But because the Savior has come to us purely out of love for fallen, broken, sinful humanity, we must share His compassionate love with everyone we encounter, especially those whom we are inclined to ignore or condemn for whatever reason. For we do not relate to Jesus Christ as isolated individuals, but as members of His Body who share a common

life. If we are members of His Body and receive His Body and Blood in the Eucharist, how can we disregard Him even in “the least of these” whose hearts and lives are broken, regardless of who is at fault for the circumstances?

Our Lord is a Person, not an abstract idea. Prepared by prayer, fasting, and confession, let us unite ourselves to Him in the Eucharist, receiving His compassionate mercy even as we extend the same holy concern to our neighbors, loved ones, and enemies. He came to call sinners to repentance, to heal the sick, and to raise the dead. He came to save, bless, and restore people as broken as you and me. If we receive Him, then we must receive them. For as hard as it is to believe, He works through us to extend His compassion to others. To be in Him is to become a living icon of His mercy, a personal sign of His salvation.

Stay safe, sane and healthy!

We will overcome these difficult times together!

God Bless you all!

Father Lucian