

A HOMILY FOR THE SUNDAY OF THE HOLY  
MYRRHBEARING WOMEN

About the Commitment and Devotion of the Holy Myrrhbearers

Brothers and sisters,

This Sunday, the third of Pascha, is dedicated to the memory of the Holy Myrrhbearing Women. Moved by feelings of deepest love for their divine Teacher and ardent devotion to Him, the Myrrhbearers selflessly served our Christ and His disciples, providing for them out of their substance. They hearkened attentively to the Lord's word and, as much as possible, followed Him about as He walked the Holy Land *preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all manner of*

*sickness and all manner of disease among the people.*<sup>1</sup> When the apostles, *for fear of the Jews,*<sup>2</sup> fled at the onset of Christ's sufferings, they remained by His side. They traced His steps as He dragged the Cross to Golgotha, making plain their co-suffering with Him by weeping bitterest tears. They were not scattered by the earthquake, nor put to flight by the oppressive *darkness* that covered *all the land from the sixth hour unto the ninth hour.*<sup>3</sup> Likewise, they refused to slip away into the crowd of evildoers descending from Golgotha after the most heinous of crimes. Instead Mary Magdalene, Salome, Joanna, and the rest remained on the sacred hill, nailed, as it were, with Christ to the Cross. *When the even was come, and a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple,*<sup>4</sup> arrived with Nicodemus to remove the Lord's body from the Tree, they

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 4:23

<sup>2</sup> John 7:13; 19:38; 20:19

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 27:45

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 27:37

tenderly assisted him. After *Joseph had taken down the body* which is the Source of our life, they helped him wrap *it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock.* Following this, they aided Joseph and Nicodemus in rolling *a great stone to the door of the sepulchre,* then *departed.*<sup>5</sup> Although just a short time was left before sunset, when the Sabbath rest of the Jews began and the markets closed, they rushed back into the city to purchase the precious ointments necessary for anointing Jesus' corpse. But as for *Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary* (their chief) – that is, the Lord's immaculate Mother – they tarried for a little while, *sitting over against the sepulchre.*<sup>6</sup>

Now, *that Sabbath was an high day,*<sup>7</sup> being the Sabbath of Passover, and after taking some rest, the holy Myrrhbearers

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<sup>5</sup> Matt. 27:39-60

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 27:61

<sup>7</sup> John 19:31

returned to the tomb *while it was yet dark*<sup>8</sup> in various groups, as the Gospels relate. They were not held back by the gloom of night, nor by what might befall them on the way at the hands of wicked men, but had one thought only: *Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?* Apparently, it was only after some time that all of them learned that a seal had been set and guards posted at the grave.

From this it is clear that many obstacles lay on the holy Myrrhbearer's good path, obstacles to their cleaving to Christ, but they remained committed and steadfast in the face of them all. As a result, God blessed them with ineffable joy. At length the Myrrhbearers found that the *stone*, about which they were so concerned, had been *rolled away, and entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment.* This was an angel, and he

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<sup>8</sup> John 20:1

announced to them the Resurrection of Christ. Thus as it happened that a woman was first to sin and inflicted a poisonous wound upon all mankind, so it happened that the supernal healing of death, the wound's chief consequence, was first proclaimed to these holy women, who would in turn proclaim it to the apostles.

Brothers and sisters, the beautiful example of the holy Myrrhbearing Women clearly teaches that there must be numerous obstacles lying on our good path to virtue and salvation, the path of following Christ, but if we are to achieve anything of real value, then we must remain, like the Myrrhbearers, always committed and steadfast. This blessed path leads us through three series of obstacles, in the following order of importance:

First and foremost is the course laid out by the evil one to prevent us from taking possession of our own souls, *for what*

*shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*<sup>9</sup> Inextricably bound up with acquiring the basic faith and the commitment to spiritual struggle required to gain one's soul is commitment and devotion to the Holy Church of Christ, which is His very Body, and to one's local parish, which provides our souls essential and common spiritual nurture on an ongoing basis, something indispensable for our salvation. For in the words of Saint John Chrysostom, "We are saved together, but perish alone." Therefore, the devil devotes his greatest efforts to undermining a man's faith and resolution to engage in spiritual combat, as well as to weakening his bonds to the Holy Church and the parish.

Second comes the course of obstacles relating to the family. The Christian family should be a second, little parish, where

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<sup>9</sup> Mark 8:36-37; Matt. 16:26; Luke 9:25

man and wife apply to domestic life the principles learned in the struggle for personal salvation and service to the church. So doing, they both further their own salvation and teach their children how to achieve theirs. But the evil one and his black minions are only too eager to stir up turmoil between husband and wife, and between parents and children, for they know how destructive of spiritual wellbeing are the absence of patience, love, condescension, and obedience, especially in the family.

Third comes the course of obstacles relating to society. In our context, this means the workplace and our other scenes of interaction with people that are neither kin, nor fellow parishioners, nor other Orthodox Christians. These test well our Christian commitment and virtue, showing how real it is, or is not.

Only ardent, selfless love for Christ will guide us past all three of these sets of obstacles successfully, as it guided the

Holy Myrrhbearers past those on their good path of following Christ wherever He led.

Our first mother Eve permitted herself to become entangled in the net of self-love and, putting aside her obligation before God, made a fatal mistake, the consequences of which have profoundly affected all of us. But her descendants the holy Myrrhbearers in their self-sacrificing love for Christ forgot love for self and in their persons restored our nature to its once-exalted dignity. May God grant all of us the grace to love the Saviour ardently and to follow Him closely past every obstacle, as did they, so that we may share in that dignity, as well as their joy in the holy Resurrection. Amen.