



## SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH

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### THIRD PASCHAL SUNDAY

("Sunday of the Myrrhbearers")

3 May 2020

**TONE 2**—*The Myrrh-Bearing Women, Pious Joseph of Arimathea & Righteous Nicodemus; Great-martyr and Trophy-bearer George (translated from April 23).*

#### FIRST ANTIPHON

Shout with joy to God, all the earth; sing to His Name, give glory to His praises. *Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us!*

Say to God: How awesome are Thy works; let all the earth worship Thee, and sing to Thee. (R.)

Glory ... Now and ever ... (R.)

#### SECOND ANTIPHON

May God have mercy upon us, and bless us, and may He cause His face to shine upon us, and have mercy upon us. *Save us, O Son of God, who art risen from the dead, as we chant to Thee, Alleluia!* That Thy way may be known on earth, Thy salvation among all nations. Let the people give thanks to Thee, O God, let all peoples give thanks to Thee. (R.) *Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten Son ...)*

#### THIRD ANTIPHON

*Christ is risen ...* with the following verses:

- Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered, let those who hate Him flee from before His face.
- As smoke vanishes, so let them vanish; as wax melts before the fire, so let sinners perish before the Face of God; but let the righteous be glad.
- This is the day which the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

#### LITTLE ENTRANCE

*In the churches bless God the Lord from the springs of Israel. Save us, O Son of God, who art risen from the dead, as we chant to Thee, Alleluia!*

TROPARION OF RESURRECTION (Tone 2): When Thou didst submit Thyself unto death, O Thou deathless and immortal One, then Thou didst destroy hell with Thy godly power. And when Thou didst raise the dead from beneath the earth, all the powers of heaven did cry aloud unto Thee: O Christ, Thou giver of life, glory to Thee!

TROPARIA FOR JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA AND THE MYRRH-BEARERS: The noble Joseph, when he had taken down Thy most pure body from the Tree, wrapped it in fine linen and anointed it with spices and placed it in a new tomb. // The angel came to the myrrh-bearing women at the tomb and said: "Myrrh is fitting for the dead, but Christ has shown Himself a stranger to corruption!"

TROPARION OF ANTHONY THE GREAT (Tone 4): Like the zealous Elijah thou didst become, and followed John the Baptist in his upright ways. A dweller in the wilderness, thou didst steady the world by prayer. O Father Anthony, intercede with Christ our God for our souls' salvation.

KONTAKION OF PASCHA (Tone 8): Although Thou didst descend into the tomb, O Immortal One, Thou didst destroy the power of death! In victory didst Thou arise, O Christ God, proclaiming "Rejoice" to the Myrrhbearing Women, granting peace to Thine Apostles, and bestowing resurrection of the fallen.

## TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *The Lord is my strength and my song. The Lord has chastened me severely.*

*The Reading is from the Acts of the Apostles*

(Acts 6:1-7) In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministry. And the twelve summoned the multitude of disciples and said: "It is not right that we should forsake the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good report, full of Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. And we will devote ourselves 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 of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochoros, and Nikanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nikolaos a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

The notion that one is called and sanctified by the Spirit of God for a specific ministry in the Church came to us from the way in which prophets and priests were viewed in ancient Israel. We read today that "a **great company of the priests**"—priests of the Jerusalem Temple—became followers of Christ: Christians. Through them the Church has inherited many of the traditions and practices of the Temple; and these come alive, if we have our eyes open, in the course of our Divine Liturgy. As with the priests and prophets of old, the ministry of Christian deacons, priests, and bishops is not simply an administrative arrangement, but a spiritual one.

With the Acts of the Apostles, we find ourselves at the very beginning of the Church, in the time of the Holy Apostles. And we see that even then, among the earliest Christians, the state of fallen humanity is evident. "**The Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministry**"—one group of believers sets itself against another; Greek-speaking Jews, probably from Egypt, and Aramaic-speaking Jews from Palestine, were at odds over some petty, all-too-human, reasons.

We also see that the Church adapts itself to serve the specific needs of its less-than-perfect members. When it becomes clear that some concrete measure is necessary (here, it was all about attention and food), God blesses and empowers a certain type of ministry in the Body of Christ. Today's text speaks, specifically, about the institution of deacons. What are these "deacons"?

On the one hand, deacons are appointed to minister to the physical needs of the community, so as to free up the Apostles who serve by preaching the Word. On the other hand, this "basic"

ministry of the deacons is still a *spiritual* matter: these are people “**full of faith and of the Holy Spirit**” and they receive the blessing of the Apostles, who “**prayed and laid their hands upon them.**”

Let us therefore keep the following in mind: *everything in the Church* is “iconic.” Everything, even mundane realities: the bread and wine required for the celebration of the Eucharist; the physical building and its furnishings, including the garments and vessels used by the clergy; the books, the chanting, the candles; the way we walk and talk and sing in church; the way we use money; the food we share after the service; cleaning and maintaining the building, etc, etc, etc—*everything in Church* is “iconic”: the Church itself and everything associated with it reflects God’s becoming man, so that He might raise us into God’s purifying and deifying presence.

Thus, the bread and wine become the body and blood of the Risen Christ, a house of brick and wood becomes the house of God, servers at the tables become deacons of God’s grace, and our entire congregation of sinners becomes the assembly of those who sing together with the angels and rejoice as they learn to repent and are being saved.

## TODAY’S GOSPEL READING

*The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Mark*

(Mark 15:43-16:8) At that time, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council who was also looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. And Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. And he bought a linen shroud, and laid him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid. And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?” And looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back; for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has 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 to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.” And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were greatly afraid.

Today we commemorate Joseph of Arimathea—“the noble Joseph” of the Great Friday hymns—and those saintly women who came to anoint the body of Christ and found the tomb empty: the Myrrhbearing Women. These people most likely did not grasp the mystery of Christ during His earthly ministry. Yet, they displayed extraordinary affection for Jesus of Nazareth in his bitterest hour: when all disciples had abandoned, denied, or betrayed Him, the women stayed with him during his ordeal; and when all were scrambling to distance themselves from the Crucified One, Joseph and Nicodemus went to Pilate to ask that they be allowed to give Jesus a proper burial; Joseph had the nobility of heart to offer his own grave for the one who died a stranger to all. As the hymn says, he came by night to Pilate to beg for the Life-giving body of the Lord: “Give me this stranger who has no place to lay his head, give me this stranger whom an evil disciple betrayed unto death.”

We remember the noble Joseph every time we bring our gifts of bread and wine into the altar, and place them on the holy table. This happens at the Great Entrance, while the congregation

finishes singing the Cherubic Hymn; the priest places a large veil over the wine and the bread, censes the gifts, and says: *"The noble Joseph, when he had taken down Thy most pure body from the Tree, wrapped it in fine linen and anointed it with spices and placed it in a new tomb."* We seek, in other words, to approach the altar with the reverence of the noble Joseph.

Moreover, we are called, again and again, in Liturgy, to do the same as Joseph: to entrust ourselves and our whole life to Christ our God. What kind of "life" do we have? A mortal life, a dead life, a life that ends in the grave. Let us welcome Christ in this tomb of ours, so that He would make true Life—eternal life, risen life—to dawn in us. Scripture says: **to those who have received Him He has given the power to be children of God**; this "power" He gives us is the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, **"if the Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies"** (Rom 8:11)

The new Life that is in the Risen Christ contains seeds meant to leaven and renew our individual and communal life even in this age; seeds that inaugurate that mysterious transformation of which St. Paul speaks forcefully when he teaches about the Resurrection of Christ as *our* first step towards the age to come. Some things also change outwardly and are a testimony to the Paschal revolution set in motion by the Resurrection. Thus, in today's Apostle text we read of men who are "deacons"—meaning that they "serve" (they are "deaconizing," says the Greek text) at tables and distribute material goods to the community—and of women who are sent out ("apostled," if this were a word) to preach and be "apostles to the apostles." Indeed, being male or female becomes irrelevant for salvation; the only relevant criterion is whether one is in Christ or not. *All* those "in Christ" also share in Christ's priesthood—*all* Christians are made priests in the most fundamental sense of having access to God, offering themselves and each other to Him (as a priest would offer up sacrifices), and calling on the God of all as "Father." As with male and female, being Jewish or Gentile by physical birth is also irrelevant, as the call to enter the Kingdom through the Messiah is issued to any and all who would open their hearts to the reality of God's saving love.

The Resurrection bursts the categories of fallen creation. That is why, when faced with the resurrection, the Myrrhbearers react with holy fear, and are *awestruck*. That is also why we have no icon of the resurrection per se: we either depict Christ descending into hell, to burst open the prison holding Adam, Eve, and their descendants; or we depict the women at the empty tomb. These myrrhbearing women are also forever remembered. We sing about them on Sundays, saying that "they boasted to the apostles" about the Resurrection of Christ. And we boast together with them, announcing the death of death, the end of mortality, the forgiveness of sins, and the dawn of a new life in the Risen Christ.

## REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

LIVING: Dollie; Mother Barbara (recovering after surgery); Maura (Andronic); Don (Dollie's brother); Ann (Wilson), recovering after her new surgery; Nyal, Jean's son-in-law (motorcycle accident); Joseph Totin; Ion, Marius & Katherine (Stan); Serbanescu and Becker families; Gabriel; Charitini; Stella & Dimitrios; Christine (Abraham); Dollie; Venetia; Maura; Ann; Ed, Peter, John, Jonathan and Joanna; Andrei; Kent, Bob, David (relatives of Jean); Stelian; Diane); Susannah; Ed Sr (Totin).

DEPARTED: Karen (Jane Best's daughter); Frank (Seba's brother); Kurt (Melinda's father); Jackie (Rose Totin's mother); Maria (Stella Lyras' sister); Sula; Kurt (Diane's son); Viorica; Norma; Miltiades; Tim (Becker); Silviu; Ross (Chrissi's friend); Richard Johns; Viorica; Bishop Antoun; Vito (DiPento); Jim and Marion (Raimondi); Stephanie (Yazge); Job; George (Georgiades); Abie (Abraham); Bill (Thomas); Marta.