SUNDAY, MAY 15, 2016 (Sunday of Myrrh-Bearing Women)

STEWARDSHIP QUOTE— The Myrrh Bearing Women Went And Found An Empty Tomb Which Showed To Them The Resurrection. A Good Steward Goes And Finds God In The Emptiness Of The World Which Allows Him To Show His Great Gift To God’s House.

MEMORIALS

Vasili Brelias—40 Days
Dr. James C. Govostis—40 Days
Panayiota Panayiotou—1 Year
Eratos Doulgeris—3 Years

TRISAGION

Ioanna Potakis
Sofia Karapanos

40 DAY BLESSING
Evan Raymond Koukari

We invite the entire Parish Family to join in prayer as the servant of God, Paul and his parents Alexis & Raymond Koukari present him to God within the church following the fortieth day of his birth. We offer congratulations and prayers that God continue to bless them with health and happiness.

COFFEE HOUR: Today’s coffee hour is being sponsored by the family of Dr. James C. Govostis in his loving memory.

For Non-Orthodox Christians: We welcome those Christians not fully united with us. It is a consequence of the sad divisions of Christianity that we cannot extend to you a general invitation to receive Holy Communion. Orthodox Christians believe that the Eucharist is an action of the celebrating community signifying a oneness in faith, life, and worship. Reception of the Eucharist by Christians not fully united with us would imply a oneness which does not yet exist and for which we must all pray. We do however invite you to receive the blessed bread that is given out to all at the end of service.
Now, we know the triumph of Christ. We know the end of the story. We walk with these women to the tomb, as they despair, hopeless. Yet still in our lives, we also may deal with despair. Why am I stuck in this job? Why can’t I pay my bills? Why can’t be patient with my children? Why do I feel so alone? When we are abandoned, when we try to follow God’s will but can’t see the way, when we lose someone or something we don’t think we can live without, when we suffer, perhaps that is when we experience Christ as dead.

In today’s Gospel, the tomb as Joseph provides for Christ’s burial and the myrrh bearing women come to anoint Christ’s body with spices and oils, only to discover that the tomb is empty. They run from the garden, the Bible tells us, “amazed and bewildered.” Now, we’ve walked through Lent, now in the last few days of Lent. We prayed and worshipped through the intensity of Holy Week that erupted into the Joy and triumph of Pascha, proclaiming that Christ through His death has trampled down death, and we’ve experienced the celebration and lightness of Bright Saturday, when we saw that Christ is alive. But the myrrh bearers had to go through the pain of seeing Christ’s body before it was resurrected. Folk seem to have been just lanced in them, usually – their paths were laid that way. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn’t. And if they had, we shouldn’t know, because they had been forewarned. We have the same choice to make, to all to a good end, mind you; at least not to what folk inside a story call a good end…’I wonder what sort of a tale we’ve fallen into?’

Yet even in the face of hopelessness, these women act. They buy ointments that will help his body dry out as it decays, and sweet spices so that even in death, his body is honored. Their actions show their steadfast love for Christ, their desire to be with him, and their determination to follow him. They were not afraid to leave their life behind for the sake of Christ. Even after it was too late, they still went to the tomb to honor Christ’s body.

In their actions, we see that the myrrh bearers came to anoint Christ not out of a desire for any recognition or reward from Jesus, nothing that they could get out of it. He is dead. The women probably have no recollection that Christ said he would rise again, so they probably have no hope of triumph in Jesus’ death. They come not to receive, and probably not consciously to give either, but they are motivated by their love for him. They want His body to be blessed with sweet smelling fragrances.

Yet these women are honored with being the first witnesses to Christ’s resurrection. They were the first to know the joy that Christ had defeated death, that hope was fulfilled, that despair and grief were not all that was left to them. And, they were the first commissioned with going and telling others that Christ had risen from the dead.

The myrrh bearers are not unlike some of our great commission, but they received this as a result of their desire to love and serve Christ even after death.

Now, we know the triumph of Christ. We know the end of the story. We know this even as we walk with these women through the tomb. When we are abandoned in our lives, we also may deal with despair. Why am I stuck in this job? Why can’t I pay my bills? Why can’t be patient with my children? Why do I feel so alone? When we are abandoned, when we try to follow God’s will but can’t see the way, when we lose someone or something we don’t think we can live without, when we suffer, perhaps that is when we experience Christ as dead.

In the recent film trilogy and popular book, The Lord of the Rings, the two main characters are Frodo and Sam. It seems kind of far fetched to talk about different stories. But there’s kind of a lot going on here. Like how about different is it to not merely be the readers of a tale, but in the middle of it, not knowing how it will really end up. If you don’t mind, I’d like to read you this passage. It begins with Sam talking to Frodo:

“I used to think that the old tales and songs were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, not what folk inside a story call a good end…’I wonder what sort of a tale we’ve fallen into?’

‘I wonder,’ said Frodo. ‘But I don’t know. And that’s the way of a real tale. Take any one that you’re fond of. You may know, or guess, what kind of a tale it is, happy-ending or sad-ending, but the people in it don’t know. And you don’t want them to…’You and I, Sam, are still stuck in the middle of the old tales and songs. It is all too likely that some will say at this point: “Shut the book now, dad, we don’t want to read anymore.”’

I think there is a reason why we return to the tomb after Pascha. The Church has specifically set us, through the lectionary, our return to the experience of Joseph and the myrrh bearers after they had lost their hope. The Church brings us back to the worst place of our story. For while we know now of Christ’s resurrection, and while we have been given the commission as witnesses to go and tell about the risen Christ, still we, like Frodo and Sam are also in the middle of our tale, not knowing how it will end. It is interesting that the first New Testament reading for today tells of the selection of the first deacons of the Jerusalem Church. Perhaps the model for these deacons and the model for all service is the myrrh bearers. As we heard this morning, the deacons were established to serve the widows who were being neglected. So the Church reminds us that in the same way that Joseph took Christ’s body down from the cross, the myrrh bearers came to honor Christ’s body and bore witness to Christ’s resurrection, as the deacons began their service by distributing food to the needy, so all of us are commissioned to love the body of Christ, the Church.

We know that Christ has trampled down death by death, yet still we live doing battle against this present darkness (Eph. 6:12). We struggle for justice and peace, we fight against ourselves to love our neighbors. But let’s be honest. Sometimes we believe the triumph of Christ ultimately, but our actions today do not reflect that belief. So I want to talk about this story before Easter this year. This lesson of the myrrh bearers reminds us that even when we question how our stories will end, whether Christ truly will triumph in us, still we can get up early and bring spices to the Christ that we love, even when all seems lost.

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And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And they were amazed, and entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in white garments, 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.


IN THOSE DAYS, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, “it is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good reputation, whom we appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, 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 greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

GOSPEL READING: John 20:19-31

At that time, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. And Pilate wondered if he was 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 taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud, and laid him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock; and it was a new tomb, and there was never any man laid in it. And when Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.

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Sometimes in our work within the Church, in our attempts to love within our families, within society, it might often feel like we’re working with a dead corpse. But we may be surprised to find what we thought was dead is alive yet. For the myrrh bearers brought the myrrh bearers is not unlike God’s love: It cannot be destroyed by death. Christ died but has risen, trampling down our despair, trampling down injustice, trampling down persecution, trampling down sickness, trampling down war, trampling down evil, trampling down death. Christ is victorious. This is the hope that we have our hope to go on. Not false hope, but based on the reality of the resurrection, the message of the angel to the women at the tomb, passed down through the ages, through time and space, delivered to us here today, April 25th, 2004. You and I may still be stuck in the worst parts of our tales, but today we’re reminded through the Myrrh bearers of the victory that is truly here, and that is coming when our own tale is fulfilled. Christ is Risen

Delivered on the Sunday of the Holy Myrrhbearing Women at St. Mary Orthodox Church, Cambridge, MA