

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



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*Christ is Risen! Christos Voskrese! Al'masir Qam! Christos Anesti!*

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3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Holy Pascha+ Myrrh Bearing Women

Sunday, May 2, 2020



Today the Church celebrates the memory of the holy myrrh-bearing women. The holy women were faithful disciples of Christ and always remained near the Lord in His earthly service. They listened to his preaching in Galilean synagogues, walked with Him to Jerusalem, were present at the resurrection of Lazarus, cried with the

Mother of God at the foot of the Savior's Cross and followed Joseph and Nicodemus to the tomb. They spent the hours following the Crucifixion in pain and agony with what was left of the Lord's disciples. Undoubtedly, their hearts burnt with the desire to run to the Lord, but they observed the Sabbath with other Jews "because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity" (John 19:31).

Yet the sacred day of the Sabbath of the Great Stillness came to an end, and with the first rays of the rising sun, having gathered all that was necessary for burial, the holy women hurried to Him, whom alone their hearts desired, to their beloved Teacher (Mark 16:2). Did they believe in the resurrection of the Savior? Did they remember the sermons of the Teacher? Did they recall the festive entrance of the King  
*(continued p. 3)*

\*\*\* Myrrh Bearing Women \*\*\*

St. Theodosius of the Kiev Caves

Epistle: Acts 6: 1-7

Gospel: Mark: 15:43-16:8

St. George Orthodox Christian Church is a community of believers who strive to live a life according to the Gospel of Christ and teachings of the Church.

We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

We are dedicated to living out Christ's commandment to, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, ad with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*

## ***How We Survive Self-Isolation, by Metropolitan Hilarion of Moscow***

We have been living in self-isolation for nearly two months already. We can't go outside, can't visit anyone, and many are battling boredom. The question arises, what should we do? How can we fight against these many temptations?

First of all, I would like to advise you who are now facing these problems, to learn how to live an inner life. Unfortunately, we are very dependent on external circumstances. Very often people connect their

whole lives with various circumstances: they are busy with work or study, or both, then they entertain themselves, and thus time passes, and living seems not boring for them. But when a person suddenly finds himself in four walls, he begins to ask himself what he should do.

In fact, one's happiness, as Jesus Christ tells us, does not depend on one's wealth, material goods, or external circumstances. It, first of all, depends on one's inner world. If

you learn how to create your inner world in such a way that you will never be bored, it will be the best thing you can learn in the current situation. What do we, Christians, have?

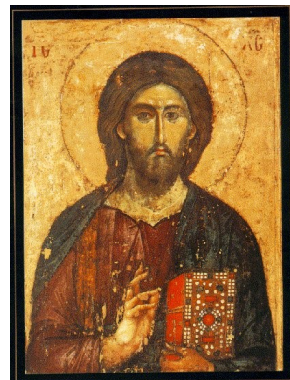
First, we have prayer. Even now, when many of us are unable to go to a church, no one can prevent us from making our own apartment and our own heart a church. Devote your time to pray to God. Moreover, it is possible to pray to God in  
*(continued p.2)*

We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

If you have any questions about the church or would like to speak with our pastor,

please call Fr. Matthew at 607-280-1586

Glory be to Jesus Christ. Glory be Forever.





*Troparion to St. George*

As the deliverer  
of captives  
and defender  
of the poor,  
healer of the infirm  
and champion of kings,  
victorious great  
martyr George  
intercede with Christ  
our God  
for our souls  
salvation.

**News and Notes**

We welcome all who are worshipping with us today and invite you down to the church hall for our social hour.

**Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)**

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Lillian, Meg, Larissa, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Lorraine, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Bonnalee, Vicky, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

**Love Keeps Evil Away, by Fr. Corneal Todeasa**

What must one do to become victorious in this spiritual warfare? We find an answer in a conversation the Lord has with a lawyer in the Gospel of Luke. Inquiring about eternal life, the Lord directs the lawyer to the teachings of the law, asking him, "What is written in the law?" The lawyer replies, "You shall love the Lord

your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind," and "your neighbor as yourself." The Lord says, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live (Luke 10: 25-37)."

The answer is in one word. Love. Love is the matrix of our true lives. There is no life without love, but only emptiness. Therefore, we must fill our hearts with the true love of God and of our neighbor so that they overflow with the grace of God and have no vacant room for the evil one to target or occupy. We must welcome the healing power of God to fill our hearts with his love, to open our minds to His true knowledge and to guide us to always follow Him.

When we forget about God and the wonders of his creation, we become easy targets of the evil one. Let us not be distracted by society's peripherals, which only vacate Christ from us, but fill up our hearts with love for our fellow human beings. Let us strengthen and start new friendships, forgive and ask forgiveness, and help the needy around us.

**How We Survive Self-Isolation, (cont'd from p. 1)**

different ways. It is not necessary to just read the prayers that are printed in the prayer book. You can just sit and talk with God. You are bored, you are alone, you have no one to communicate with: turn to God. Speak with Him, tell Him everything that bothers you, that has hurt you, everything that worries you. And then try to hear the answer. Maybe you won't hear it right away, maybe the answer will come through some circumstances in your life. But if you turn to God, He will certainly respond.

We can also find comfort in reading or watching spiritually rewarding movies. I would certainly advise everyone to read the Bible. Moreover, the Bible is a large book, it consists of two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. If you have never read the Bible and it is the first time you hold it in your hands, do not try to read it from the beginning to end. Actually, I would even advise you to not read the Bible from the beginning, but open it right at the part

called the New Testament, and start reading it from the Gospel of Matthew. Read it, then the Gospel of Mark, then Luke, then John. After these four Gospels, you will already have an idea of who Jesus Christ is, when He lived, what He taught, and most importantly, you can understand why Jesus Christ is still relevant, that is, what you can apply from His teachings in your own life.

Again, there are so many interesting movies. I would like to share with you my impressions of one film that I watched last year, I would highly recommend it. It's called Breakthrough, it's an American movie of 2019. It is based on a true story about several children fell through the ice. One boy spent more than 15 minutes in the icy water, and when he was pulled out, he was unconscious. Doctors said that the boy will not return to life, and even if he returns, he will not return to consciousness. But his mother was a deeply religious woman, she said, "I will pray, I will do everything so that he returns to life." Throughout

the film, she shows how she prayed, how she cared for her son, how she did not allow talking about how he would not survive in his presence, although he was in a coma. In the end, this boy returned to life contrary to the prognosis of all the doctors.

And the most interesting thing in this film is that it absolutely truly reproduces the story that happened only a few years ago in one American town. I think such films show what faith can do, even in our difficult conditions. And now, when some of us are under the threat of the virus, when our loved ones are in a difficult situation, prayer is the most important thing we can help them with. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." (Lk. 11,9).



*(Homily on the Myrrh Bearing Women, cont'd from p.1)*

into the Holy City and the children singing, “Hosanna! Blessed is the One Who comes!” (John 12:13)? Even if they still had any hope for a miracle, like that of the resurrection of Lazarus, this hope was now lying mocked, spit upon, broken, crucified, pierced with a spear, in the tomb with their beloved Teacher.

The holy myrrh-bearers walked to the tomb with perfumes and burial cloths (Luke 24:1), not processional banners, to prepare a dead man for his last journey, not to meet the risen God. The sorrow of the holy women was so great, that even when they saw the wide open tomb they did not understand what had happened (Luke 24:4), even having seen the risen Lord, Mary Magdalene thought that He was the cemetery gardener (John 20:15).

But the faithfulness of the holy myrrh-bearers to the Lord was so great, that they walked to Him in the dark (John 20:1) despite the guards who were ordered to keep the disciples away from the Body (Matt. 27:64), they walked despite the large stone which lay in their way to the Teacher (Matt. 27:66), they walked despite all odds.

For their faithfulness the holy women became the apostles to the apostles and brought to them the good news of the resurrection (Luke 24:9). Even before the Evangelists picked up their pens, before the apostles walked to the far reaches of the Empire with the sermon, before Peter proclaimed the good news to thousands on the day of Pentecost, the myrrh-bearers brought to the apostles the first proclamation, and the first sermon, and the first Gospel.

How often in our lives we lose our faith when we must go through illness, inconvenience, suffering, and sorrow. At times it seems to us that our God is dead, that He does not hear us, that some armed people do not let us through, or that there is a large stone in our path and “who will roll away the stone for us...?” (Mark 16:3). So we sit shut up in our pain and sorrow, hiding in fear (John 20:19).

Yet the holy myrrh-bearers bring the good news to us as well, “Arise from your sinful slumber! With the first ray of sun, run to the Lord!” And what do we see? We are too late with our tears and burial ointments—the tomb is empty! No, God does not even run out to meet us half-way (Luke 15:20)—He completed everything that is needful for our salvation: he already broke the bonds of hell and defeated death. He already goes ahead of us to Galilee (Matt. 28:7)—His homeland. All that is left for us at the empty tomb is his message: do not be afraid, hurry, tell everyone, the Lord is waiting for you at home (Matt. 28:10).



### ***Who were the Holy Myrrh Bearers?***

The myrrh-bearers had brought funeral spices and ointments to finish committing Christ's body to the grave. They were the first to see the empty tomb and were instructed by the risen Lord to bring the joyful news to the apostles. Sts. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are also commemorated on this day.

There are eight women who are generally identified as the myrrh-bearers. Each of the four Gospels gives a different aspect of the roles of these eight women at the cross and at the tomb on Easter morning, perhaps since the eight women arrived in different groups and at different times. The eight were: Mary Magdalene (from whom Christ had cast out seven demons), the Theotokos-the Virgin Mary, Joanna (the wife of Chuza,

the administrator and steward of King Herod's household), Salome (who was a daughter of St. Joseph the Betrothed and whose husband was Zebedee), Mary the wife of Cleopas (mother of James), Susanna, Mary (sister of Lazarus) and Martha (sister of Lazarus).

Because these women proclaimed the Resurrection and contributed greatly to assuring us, with utter certainty, of Christ's Resurrection, the Church of God received the tradition of celebrating them after St. Thomas, for they were the first to see Christ risen from the dead, preached the message of salvation to all, and most excellently pursued the life according to Christ and as befitted women who were disciples of Christ.

## *The Myrrh Bearing Women-Heroes for Our Times by Daisy Sparks.*

This Sunday we commemorate the Myrrh-bearing Women - how they loved our Lord and helped him after his Crucifixion. This day is like Mother's Day and International Women's Day rolled into one for Orthodox Christians around the world. We celebrate the fearlessness of these women setting off to anoint the Lord's body with oil and wrap Him in clean linen. We marvel at the Mystery revealed at the Tomb by the Angel of the Lord as he asks them, "Why seek the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5-9)

This is a miracle above all miracles - the Resurrection, the fulfillment of what was promised by God for ages. By His death conquering all death, He is the Savior of the whole world. It was to the Myrrh-bearing women that the Salvation of the World was first revealed on Pascha. What does this mean, if anything?

Was it mere coincidence that these women disciples of the Lord received the Good News first? Was it because they were unafraid in the face of both Roman and Jewish authorities? I don't pretend to know or even surmise why they were the first witnesses of the Resurrection, but I do hope to understand how to follow their example.

These women accepted the inherent risks of walking around before dawn, defying Roman law, so that they could minister to Jesus' body after the Crucifixion. They chose to follow the Law of Moses, and they were the first to bear witness to the fulfillment of the Law, the Blessed and Holy Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Whether this was bravery or simple duty in the face of the greatest Love the world has ever known, we can learn to thank, praise, and respond to God's love with our own love in the same way. Then, we can feel brave in the face of any life circumstance.

We might ask ourselves, "What if it was I, early Sunday morning setting out on foot for the Lord's tomb? Who would roll away the stone from the door for (me)?" (Mark 16:3). Each of us has a metaphorical "stone" in our lives. It could be the recent passing of a loved one. Maybe, it's a terrible divorce. Perhaps it's the tragic loss of a child.

Certainly, we all share concerns and anxieties about the COVID-19 crisis and our health, finances, and loved ones. How do we overcome our personal fears and anxieties and reach the miracle God has waiting for us?

Truly, we no longer need ask ourselves, 'who shall remove the metaphorical stone of the COVID-19 crisis?' We know it's the Lord. We just witnessed the Resurrection and we wait for His will to reveal itself. We pray and hope for this to be over sooner than later, as the uncertainties lie in not knowing how or when, or why. We are not left without help though. We can take the Light of the Resurrection, the Faith of Believing Thomas, and the Bravery of the Myrrh-bearing women with us throughout the year. Each week, starting with the Resurrection on Pascha we build up our spiritual toolbox. We add the tools of Salvation, Faith, and this week, Bravery in the face of worldly fear. We listen and learn. We know we won't always have an answer to every question. We grow in our faith and bear witness to the Good News.

To me, the Myrrh-bearing women are personal heroes. If I spent a lifetime praying about it and trying to follow their example, I might hope to say that I, too, carried through the most difficult moments of my life with half as much faith, duty,

bravery, and good works as they did.

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### ***From Vespers of the Feast:***

Early in the morning, the myrrh-bearing women brought spices to the tomb of the Lord.

They found the stone unexpectedly rolled away, and they asked among themselves:

"Where are the seals of the tomb? Where are Pilate's guards?"

The radiant Angel came to the wondering women and proclaimed to them: "Why do you seek with tears the Life Who gives life to the human race?"

Christ our God has risen from the dead as almighty, granting us incorruption, life, enlightenment, and great mercy!"

