



**Orthodox Church of the
Entrance of the Theotokos
into the Temple**

**306 W. Main Street
Emmitsburg, MD 21727**

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Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

What brought these disciples of Jesus to the empty tomb? What propelled them, what motivated them to come in darkness in spite of the dangers they faced?

The accounts of our Lord's trial and crucifixion are filled with fear and with darkness. We hear them in a darkened church on Thursday evening of Holy Week as we sing the Matins of Great and Holy Friday. We hear about the despicable actions of those who take Jesus into custody, how they mocked Him, spat upon Him, scourged Him. We hear of how Jesus was all but deserted, about how His head disciple denied Him only to weep bitterly in repentance. And last week we heard how ten of the twelve gathered together behind locked doors, apparently in fear of the Jewish authorities, thinking that they too would be rounded up and brought to trial themselves. And of course, how can any of us forget the great indignity of the cross, how only a few of His disciples were present, only one of the 12 – John – stood by Him at the foot of the cross with His mother, Mary Magdalene and one or two others.

The descriptions of the Passion and Death of our Lord in the Holy Gospels are truly frightening, as I said, filled with fear and darkness. And yet, there were those who followed even to the very

end, the very beginning of the New Age! Last week we heard of the boldness of one of those apostles, Thomas, who vowed to go and die with Jesus and then boldly, loudly as Fr. Anthony reminded us, said he would not believe in the Risen Christ unless he saw with His own eyes, only then after the Lord showed Himself to Him, saying the first confession of Orthodox Faith: “My Lord and My God!”

Today, however, we focus not only loudness or boldness, but on the quiet expression of love and devotion that were the hallmark of the Holy Myrrhbearing women. I’ve heard preachers say that these women were able to go to the tomb on the first Easter morning, because they were women, and would not be likely to be prosecuted for following the One Whom the authorities considered a criminal. But the atmosphere of horror and fear and suffering that surrounded the crucifixion were such, that I do not think that was quite true. They too had much to lose, along with Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who was said to have purchased over 73 lbs. of myrrh and aloes for embalming the body of Jesus. All of them had much to fear and much to lose. The darkness of that day that we call Great and Holy Friday could have spread over their lives very quickly.

When they came to the tomb that first Easter morning, it was their love for Jesus that motivated them, that propelled them.

For me, this is the greatest and most important of all Christian mysteries: how does one come to such love? What drove them to risk life and limb not only to follow Him in life but in death? Such love cannot be engendered out of duty or fear or adherence to some sort of religious law. It can only come as the result of their relationship with Jesus – a relationship that showed them something more precious than anything – so precious that they risked going to the tomb that was guarded by a Roman guard of soldiers.

These women along with St. Joseph of Arimathea and St. Nicodemus, show us that our relationship with Jesus is one that must be based on love, the kind of love that flows out of our hearts when we encounter Him Who is the essence of love. We used to sing a hymn years ago, Love Divine, all Loves Excelling. This is Who Jesus is. When he encountered sinners, He called to repentance and forgave; He did not condemn. When he saw the sick and the suffering, He healed, and as St. John pointed out in His Gospel, did so as a sign of the Love of the Godhead. When He encountered the dead, He raised them to new life. These actions were known by the Holy Myrrhbearers, and because of them, because of Him, they loved Him. We cannot love Him if our primary motivation is fear. We can only love Him if we encounter Him as our Savior, our Great Physician.

The Church has often forgotten this throughout its history. The Church, St. John Chrysostom preached, is a hospital. We are not a courtroom, a jail, a magistrates office run by people who want to enforce right thinking or right behavior. We are a hospital! Sometimes when you go online and read the debates that take place between the various segments of Church populations, you encounter only denunciations, vicious condemnations, prideful declarations - and you must surely wonder what any of it has to do with Christ at all! How can those who

engage in such vicious finger pointing understand the joy of the Gospel at all, I wonder?

Certainly, the Holy Myrrhbearers understood this. It was the Love of Christ that they had experienced that propelled them to come out in the darkness of that first morning and go to attend to the body of the One Who Is Love Incarnate. This they understood. And if we would ever seek to succeed in bringing others to Christ, then it is His love that we must not only preach and teach, but live, so that others can see and understand this most basic of all proclamations of the Faith: that God is love, and that Jesus Christ is Love Incarnate. That was the teaching of the only one of the 12 apostles who stood at the foot of the cross said – that God is love. And that we will never bring anyone to Him if we do not make His love the essence of our message and lives!

Fr. Elias

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