

**CHRIST IS RISEN!  
HE IS RISEN INDEED!**

RESURRECTION



## *Fire & Light*

### **St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

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✠ **May 4, 2014** ✠

**Third Sunday of Pascha**

### **The Myrrhbearing Women**

Virgin-Martyr Pelagia of Tarsus (287)

St. Monica of Tagaste, Mother of St. Augustine (387)

St. Nicephorus the Hesychast of Mt. Athos (1340)

#### **The Myrrhbearers**

How they loved Jesus,  
these women who came  
to the Sepulchre  
on that sad day.  
How heavy their hearts  
and how great their surprise  
when they found the huge stone  
rolled away,  
And yet when an angel  
Proclaimed to the women  
that Jesus no longer was dead,  
How great was their joy,  
He arose from the grave  
as He said!

Kay Andrew - *Hallmark*

## *Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!*

⇒ **Blessing of Graves (Re-scheduled) ~ Forest Crest – Today - 2:00pm**

✠ **Tues. May 6 6:30pm Inquirer's Class**

✠ **Wed. May 7 6:30pm Vespers – St. John the Theologian**



**The Myrrhbearing Women ~ St. Theophan the Recluse**

For what constitutes the particular characteristics of the Myrrhbearing Women? Their constant patient following of the Lord, as if seeking Him. They minister to Him from their substance and accompany Him to Jerusalem. They follow Him as He bears the Cross. They surround Him when He is crucified on Golgotha; they watch where He is laid after He is taken from the Cross. After the Sabbath, early in the morning they hasten to the grave; and while still in total darkness they are overjoyed by the manifestation of the Resurrection, and they run to inform the Apostles about Him. With such zeal they cling to the Lord, so insatiably did they want to see Him and be near Him. And how can you not go and seek Him? Who is more beautiful than the Lord? He is adorned with virtue, more than any other of the sons of men. He is beautiful not only with divine beauty, but also with the beauty of human nature, with the lofty blend of all perfections that are natural to a human being. Those who contemplate this beauty are drawn to the Lord; and the Lord in His turn fills all who love Him with it.

**About the Great Desire of God ~ St. Nikolai of Serbia, from the Prologue**

*"Who wills everyone to be saved."* (1 Timothy 2:4)

God wants that all to be saved, that is why He descended into Hades to save those who lived on earth before His coming. For, had He not descended into Hades, an enormous number of righteous souls would have perished forever. And yet, had He not descended into Hades, the main habitat of evil against God and the human race, Hades would have remained undestroyed. Therefore, the two reasons which motivated Christ, the Giver-of-Life, to descend into Hades in the Spirit are: First, to destroy the nest of the powers of Hades and, Second, to bring from Hades to Heaven, the souls of ancestors, prophets and righteous men and women, who have fulfilled the Old Dispensation (The Old Law of God) and, by that, pleased God. Before Satan was totally jubilant at gazing upon Christ humiliated and lifeless on the Cross, Christ appeared alive and almighty in the midst of Hades, the primary abode of Satan. What unexpected and dreadful news for Satan! For three years Satan wove snares against Christ on earth and in three days, behold, Christ destroyed Satan's kingdom and carried away the most precious booty in the form of a swarm of righteous souls!

## This and That

**The Soviet Union was the product of a purely modern form of megalomania, the notion that human affairs can be ordered without the help of transcendent rules.** This book can be taken as a record of the consequences of the application of this notion, as well as a description of human experience under extreme social conditions. In the latter respect, it has special relevance for people in the United States because, as their experiences demonstrate, Soviet people are not as far from us as we might hope." - Preface to a book, *The Age of Delirium, The Decline and Fall of the Soviet Union*

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Now we have people arguing that there's no difference between being black and acting gay — that both should be treated exactly the same. Never mind that at least three of the world's major religions condemn acting gay as unnatural and immoral, while none say the same about being black.

Never mind that the First Amendment guarantees us the "free exercise" of religion, which for Christians has always meant not participating in public acts that cause others to stumble by making it appear that we condone immorality. That's why the early martyrs accepted death rather than eat meat sacrificed to idols or emperors. They knew such meat wouldn't hurt them, but they also knew eating it to save their lives would testify against truth to other people. And why else do gays insist that everybody go along with their immorality, except to show that sodomy is not sinful?

Deacon Brian Patrick Mitchell

Marriage is not a "right" for anyone. Only our abuse of it and refusal to take it seriously has allowed it to deteriorate into such an unholy concept.  
~ Michael Baumann

In short, the reality in Kiev is more complex than the black-and-white cartoon of Vladimir Putin vs. the freedom fighters drawn by our resident Russophobic elite. Perspective is in order. ~ Patrick Buchanan

*"Religious Right Cheers a Bill Allowing Refusal to Serve Gays."*

Thus did the New York Times' headline, leaving no doubt as to who the black hats are, describe the proposed Arizona law to permit businesses, on religious grounds, to deny service to same-sex couples. Examples of intolerance provided by the Times:

"In New Mexico, a photographer declined to take pictures of a lesbian couple's commitment ceremony. In Washington State, a florist would not provide flowers for a same-sex wedding. And in Colorado, a baker refused to make a cake for a party celebrating the wedding of two men." The question Gov. Jan Brewer faces?

Should Christians, Muslims, Mormons who refuse, on religious grounds, to serve same-sex couples — that photographer, that florist, that baker, for example — be treated as criminals? Or should Arizona leave them alone? (She since vetoed the bill.)

"Religious freedom," said Daniel Mach of the ACLU to the Times, is "not a blank check to ... impose our faith on our neighbors."

True. But who is imposing whose beliefs here? The baker who says he's not making your wedding cake? Or those who want Arizona law to declare that either he provides that wedding cake and those flowers for that same-sex ceremony, or we see to it that he is arrested, prosecuted and put out of business? Who is imposing his views and values here? What we are seeing in Arizona in microcosm is what we have witnessed in America for half a century: the growing intolerance of those who preach tolerance and the corruption of the concept of civil rights. - Patrick Buchanan

## Saint Nicholai on Christ's love for the Dead and on the Holy Myrrhbearers

The love of the living for the living is wonderful. The sun's light is never so wonderful.

The love of the living for the dead is wonderful. The moon's gentle radiance on a lake is never so wonderful.

Man is sublime when he cares for the living; man is more than sublime when he cares for the dead.

A man often cares for the living out of selfishness. But what selfishness can there be in a man's caring for the dead? Can the dead pay him, or express their gratitude? ...

Death has one characteristic in common with love: it, like love, works a profound change in many that experience it and go on living. A mother after a funeral goes to the graves of her children. Who goes there? The children in the mother's soul, with the mother, go to their graves. In a mother's soul, the mother lives only in a little corner; all the rest is a palace for the souls of the children taken from her.

So it is with Christ, though to an immeasurably greater extent. He submitted to the confines of the grave so that men, His children, should know the spaciousness of the limitless palace of Paradise. ...

O poor and lonely man - do not say: who will mourn for me when I die? Who will weep over my dead body? Lo, the Lord Christ has mourned for you and wept over you, both in life and in death, more whole-heartedly than your mother would for you.

Coming on earth, the Lord paid two visits to men: the first to those living in the grave of the body and the second to those in the grave of the earth. He died in order to visit His dead children. Ah, how very truly a mother dies when she goes to the graves of her children!

Concern for the dead is God's only concern; all else is God's joy. God is not concerned for the immortal angels; He rejoices in the angels, as they do in Him. He is, though, constantly concerned about how to give resurrection to men. He therefore constantly visits the graves of men, both mobile (of the body) and immobile (of the earth), with His holy angels. God's concerns for the dead are great; not because He cannot raise them to life but because not all the dead want

to be raised to life. Men refuse their own good: this is what concerns God greatly. ...

How noble is concern for the dead! Caring for us in this valley of the dead, God's angels share in God's concern. Caring for the dead, we also share in God's concern, and become in this way God's friends and fellow-workers.

But when our great Lord and God dies as a man, bowed down by men's sins, who cares for Him dead, of all those for whom He has cared from all eternity? Who visits His tomb? Who shows love for the Dead? Women. Not each and every woman, but the Myrrh-Bearing Women, whose souls had been anointed by the immortal love of Christ the Lord. Their souls were filled to overflowing with the fragrance of faith and love, and they therefore filled their hands with fragrant ointments and set off to the tomb, to anoint Christ's body with their poor ointments, with which they meant to preserve from corruption Him who Himself keeps the heavens from decay and with which they desired to anoint Him from whom the heavens take their fragrance!

O most fragrant Lord, the only fragrance of the human being and human history; how wondrously didst thou reward these devoted and faithful souls who did not forget Thee dead in Thy tomb! Thou didst make the Myrrh-bearing Women the bearers of the tidings of Thy resurrection and Thy glory! They did not anoint Thy dead body, but Thou didst anoint their living soul with the oil of gladness. The mourners of the dead became the swallows of a new spring. Those who wept at Thy tomb became saints in Thy heavenly kingdom. At their prayers, O risen Lord, have mercy on us, and save us, that we may glorify Thee, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit -- the Trinity consubstantial and undivided, now and forever, through all time and eternity. Amen.

### **Thoughts on Departing from this Life**

IN the body I lie on the earth, but my spirit aspires to behold the Lord in Glory. Though I am very sinful the Lord suffered me to know Him by the Holy Spirit, and my soul knows Him, knows how immeasurably merciful He is, and how joyous.

Until the coming of God's grace the soul fears death. She fears God Himself, because she does not know how humble and meek and merciful He is. And there is no man can apprehend the love of Christ if he has not tasted of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Beloved brethren in the Lord, the merciful Lord is my soul's witness that I write of the truth. And know, brethren—let no one deceive himself - he who does not love his brother does not love God either. The Scriptures speak justly concerning this: fulfill them word for word and you will behold in your own souls the mercy of the Lord, which will take captive the soul, for sweet is the Lord's grace.

A Saint

## ***“Who will roll away the stone for us?”***

### **On Spiritual Deadness**

- by St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (+1867)

“Who shall roll the stone from the tomb for us?” These words of the holy women have their own mysterious meaning. They are so edifying that love of neighbor and a desire for his spiritual benefit will not allow us to be silent about it.

“The tomb is our heart. The heart was once a temple, but it became a tomb. Christ enters it by means of the Sacrament of Baptism, in order to dwell in us and work in us. Then the heart is consecrated as a temple to God. We steal from Christ the possibility to work in us and enliven our “old man”, which ever follows its attraction to our fallen will, our reason poisoned by falsehood. Brought in by Baptism, Christ continues to abide in us, but He is as if wounded and mortified by our behavior. The temple of God not made by hands is turned into a cramped, dark tomb. A very great stone is rolled over its entrance. The enemies of God set a guard over the tomb, and seal its entrance blocked by the stone. They seal the stone to the cave so that in addition to the stone’s great weight, this famous seal forbids anyone to even touch the stone. The enemies of God themselves watch over the preservation of this deadness! They have thought through and set up all these obstacles in order to forestall the resurrection, to prevent it, and make it impossible.

“The stone is the soul’s illness by which all the other spiritual illnesses are guarded incurably and which the holy Fathers call insensibility. Many will say, what sort of sin is this? We have never heard of it. According to the Fathers, insensibility is the deadening of spiritual feelings, the unseen death of the human soul with respect to spiritual things in a life that is flourishing with respect to material things. From a long-term physical sickness all strength can become exhausted and the body’s abilities withered; then the illness cannot find any more food, and ceases to torment the body’s constitution. It leaves the sick man alone and wasted, as if dead and

incapable of movement due to the debilitating suffering, the terrible, dumb morbidity that is not expressed by any particular suffering.

The same thing happens to the human soul. Long-term slackness of life amidst continuous distractions, constant voluntary sins, forgetfulness of God and eternity, inattention or only superficial attention to the Gospel teachings removes from our spirit any inclination toward spiritual things, and deadens it to them. Although they continue to exist, they cease to exist for our spirit because its life has ended for them—all its strength is directed toward the material, the temporal, the vain, and the sinful.

**“Everyone who wants to dispassionately and seriously investigate the state of his soul will see the illness of insensibility in it; he will see its broad significance, its gravity and consequence, and will have to admit that it is the manifestation and witness of his deadness of soul. When we want to study the Word of God, what boredom hits us! Everything we read seems hard to understand, not worthy of attention, and strange. How quickly we want to be free of that reading! Why is this? Because we feel no affinity for the Word of God.**

“When we rise for prayer, what dryness and coldness we feel! How we rush to finish our cursory, completely distracted prayer! Why? Because we are estranged from God: we believe in God’s existence with a dead faith; He does not exist to our sensibility. Why have we forgotten eternity? Are we excluded from the number of those who must enter into its boundless realm? Doesn’t death stand before us face to face, as it does to all humans? Why is this? It is because we do not want to think about eternity; we have lost the precious foretaste of it, and acquired a false perception of our earthly sojourn. This false perception imagines that our earthly life is endless. We are so deceived and distracted by this false perception that we conform all our actions to them, bringing all the potential of our soul and body as a sacrifice to corruption, not caring at all about what awaits us in the other world.

After all, we must inevitably become permanent inhabitants of that world.

"Why does idle talk, snide laughter, judgment of our neighbors and derision of them beat forth from us as from a wellspring? Why do we spend so many unburdened hours in empty amusements, cannot get enough of them, are always leaping from one vain pastime to another, but we do not want to dedicate even the tiniest bit of time to reviewing our own sins and lamenting over them? Because we have acquired an affinity for sin, for everything vain, for everything that brings sin into a person, and by which sin is preserved within a person. Because we have lost our affinity for all exercise that brings God-beloved virtues into us; that multiplies and preserves them. Insensibility is rooted in the soul by the world which is at enmity with God, and by the fallen angels at war with God, with the aid of our own free will. It grows and gathers strength through a life according to the principles of this world; it grows and gathers strength when we follow our fallen reason and will, when we abandon service to God, and because we serve Him carelessly. When insensibility stagnates in the soul and becomes a property of it, then the world and its rulers place a seal on the stone. This seal consists in the concourse of the human soul with fallen spirits, in the spirit's assimilation of human impressions wrought upon him by fallen spirits, and in its subjection to the aggressive influence and domination by these outcast spirits.

"Who shall roll the stone from the tomb for us?' This is a question filled with anguish, sadness, and perplexity. Those souls feel this anguish, sadness, and perplexity that have directed themselves toward the Lord, leaving behind service to the world and sin. Before their gaze is revealed the sickness of insensibility in all its horrifying enormity and gravity. They desire and pray with contrition, exercise themselves in the reading of the Word of God beyond all other reading, and abide in constant awareness of their sinfulness, in constant mourning over it. In a word, they desire to become part of God and to belong to Him. They meet an unexpected resistance in their own selves that is unknown to those who

serve this world: insensibility of heart. The heart stricken by its former careless life as by a mortal wound does not discover any signs of life. In vain does the mind gather thoughts about death, about God's judgment, about the multitude of its sins, about the torments of hell, about the sweetness of paradise; in vain does the mind strive to beat upon the heart with these reflections—the heart remains devoid of feeling for them, as if hell, paradise, God's judgment, sinfulness, and the state of fallenness and demise have no relation whatsoever to the heart. It is asleep in a deep sleep, the sleep of death; it is asleep, drunken with sinful poison. Who shall roll the stone from the tomb for us? This stone is very great.

"According to the teachings of the holy fathers, in order to conquer insensibility a person must have constant, patient, uninterrupted action against that insensibility; he must have a constant, pious, and attentive life. Such a life beleaguers the life of insensibility; however this death of the human spirit cannot be put to death through human efforts alone—insensibility is destroyed by the action of divine grace. An angel of God, at God's command, comes down to help the laboring and troubled soul, rolls away the stone of hardness from the heart, fills the heart with compunction, announces to the soul the resurrection, which is the usual result of continual compunction.[3] Compunction is the first sign of a heart revived toward God and eternity. What is compunction? Compunction is a person's feeling of mercy and compassion toward himself, toward his grave state, his fallen state, a state of eternal death. Holy Scripture writes of the people of Jerusalem who were brought to this state by the preaching of the Apostle Peter and were inclined to accept Christianity that they were pricked in their heart (Acts. 2:37).

"The Lord's body had no need of the Myrrh-bearers' fragrant myrrh. Any anointing with myrrh was forestalled by the Resurrection. But by their timely purchase of myrrh, their early arrival at the first rays of the sun to the life-giving tomb, their disdain of any fear brought on by the Sanhedrin's wrath and the militant soldiers guarding the tomb and the One

interred there, the holy women showed and proved by experience their heartfelt dedication to the Lord. Their gift turned out to be unnecessary. It was rewarded a hundredfold by the appearance of the angel, up to then invisible to them, and by the announcement that could not be anything but bountifully true—that the God-Man has risen and resurrected mankind with Himself.

"Our dedication of our life and all our strength and abilities to the service of God are not needed by God for Himself—they are needed by us. We bring them like myrrh to the Lord's tomb. We shall timely buy myrrh—our good intentions. We shall renounce from our youth up all sacrifices to sin; and with the price of this we shall buy myrrh—our good intentions. It is not possible to unite service of sin to service of God: the former is destroyed by the latter. We shall not allow sin to deaden in our spirit affinity toward God and all things divine! We shall not allow sin to mark us with its impressions, or to forcibly prevail over us.

"Whoever enters into service of God from the very days of an unspoiled youth and remains in this service with constancy submits himself to the endless influence of the Holy Spirit, marks himself with the all-holy grace-filled impressions that emanate from the Spirit, acquires in good time an active knowledge of Christ's Resurrection, comes alive in spirit in Christ, and becomes chosen by God to be a preacher of the resurrection to his brothers and sisters. Whoever has become a slave to sin through his ignorance or inclination, who has entered into concourse with fallen spirits, has become one of their number, who has lost in his spirit the connection to God and to the dwellers of heaven—let him heal himself with repentance. Let us not put off our healing from day to day, so that death might not creep upon us unawares and take us suddenly, so that we would not be proved incapable of entering the habitations of unending rest and festival, so that we would not be cast down as useless chaff into the fires of hell that burn eternally but do not consume. The healing of old illnesses does not happen so quickly and conveniently as ignorance might imagine. There is a reason why God's mercy

grants us time for repentance; there is a reason why all the saints begged God to give them time for repentance. Time is needed to erase the sinful impressions; time is needed for us to be marked by the impressions of the Holy Spirit; time is needed to cleanse us from defilement; time is needed to clothe ourselves in the garments of virtue, to adorn ourselves in the God-beloved qualities that adorn all those who dwell in heaven.

"Christ is resurrected in the person who is prepared for it, and the tomb—the heart—again becomes a temple of God. Arise, O Lord, save, O my God (Ps. 3:7); in Thy mysterious and yet essential Resurrection is my salvation. Amen."

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### **The Spiritual Twins: Love and Faith**

~ St. Justin Popovich (+1979)

**"And this is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment." (1 John 3:23)**

**Behold, the abridged Gospel of salvation: faith in Christ and divine love.** Actually, these two things are one commandment; because they combine one feeling with one disposition: whoever believes in Christ believes because he loves Him. Love grows through faith and through love faith grows. One through the other increases and perfects itself. They are spiritual twins. Love increases through faith and faith through love. Whosoever loves the Lord Christ and believes in Him and in everything that is of Him, he has trust in Him, trust that gives him love. Faith reveals to us the mystery of the God-man; the more one knows the Lord Christ, he loves Him that much more; the more he loves Him, the mystery of Christ is revealed to him that much more. The evangelic experience has been attested to: That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love (Eph. 3:17). This, two in one virtue (love and faith) gives birth to the rest of the evangelic virtues in the soul; through all of them the Lord dwells in us and we dwell in the Lord.

## More Wisdom from the Holy Optina Elders

"Flee suspicion like fire, for the enemy of the human race uses it to catch people in his nets; and strives to present everything in a distorted appearance --- white is black and black is white, as he did in Paradise with our ancestors Adam and Eve."

(St. Ambrose, +1891)

"I advise you to cheer up with prayer - even if it is brief - and the trust that, just as after winter and severe bad weather [a] pleasant springtime arrives, so also - after boredom - pleasant delights quickly appear; and, therefore, concern yourself with this hope."

(St. Anthony, +1865)

"Boredom is the grandfather of despondency, and laziness is the daughter. In order to drive it away, exert yourself at work --- do not be lazy at prayer. Then, boredom will pass and grace will come. And if you add patience and humility to this, you will spare yourself from much evil."

(St. Ambrose, +1891)

"To not have any sorrows and suddenly receive tranquility --- in no way is this possible. When we conquer all the passions, exterminate pride and acquire humility, then we will find rest; for the Lord commanded us to learn meekness and humility from Him, in order to obtain rest (Matt. 11:29)."

(St. Macarius, +1860)

"When you want to receive true spiritual rest, then listen to the Lord, Who has commanded us: *learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall have rest unto your souls* (Matt. 11:29). See what the Lord especially commands of us to learn: humility and meekness, which only can give us rest. But this science is not mastered all at once - and not in one day or one year - but with much time and Divine help --- forcing oneself to pray."

(St. Macarius, +1860)

"In condemning others, we imagine ourselves to be someone of importance; and we are deprived of peace. You know the words of the Lord: *"Learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls."* So if we do not have spiritual peace, it means that we do not have humility and meekness."

(St. Macarius, +1860)

"One must treat holy books and holy objects with reverence. Above all, one must have fear of God; for it teaches reverence, and it teaches everything good. Careless and irreverent treatment of holy things can become a habit. This must not happen."

(St. Nikon, +1931)

"In the depths of His Unfathomable wisdom, the Lord does not always fulfill our petitions immediately; but puts them off for some time. However, He does not leave unrewarded anything good [that] is done in His name. If He does not reward the mother and father, then He generously rewards their children and descendants; for the Lord is righteous, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."

(St. Anthony, 1865)