



## *Fire & Light*

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**April 30, 2017**

### **The Myrrhbearing Women**

**Holy Apostle James, Brother of St. John**



**The Holy Myrrhbearers: Sts. Mary Magdalene (July 22), Mary the Wife of Cleopas (May 23), Salome, the Mother of the Apostles James (April 30) and St. John the Theologian, Sons of Zebedee (May 8, Sept. 26), Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward (June 27), Martha and Mary, the Sisters of Lazarus (June 4) and Susanna**

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

### **HOMILY~ About the Reversed Values in the Kingdom of God**

"But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first" (Matthew 19:30).

"For behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last" (Luke 13:30).

How All-wise is He Who spoke these words! He did not say that all the first will be last and all the last will be first, "but many." There is not one error in the Gospel and nowhere in the Gospel is there any exaggeration.

Why did the Lord put a limit and did not say "all" but rather "many." Experience teaches us that some of those who were first in honor on earth remained first in honor with God. There were emperors who, from their thrones, pleased God and, there were men who were without authority until their death, angered God. There were wealthy men, who by their charity and faith, were saved, and there were the indigent who, because of their evil and unbelief, received condemnation. There were learned men who kept the faith and did good deeds and there were unlearned men who rejected both faith and good deeds. And so, there were some who were first here on earth who remained first there in heaven also and there were some who were last here [on earth] and remained last there [in heaven] also.

But alas, "many" first here became last there. And, O the joy, O the justice of God; how "many" who were last here have become "first" there! The Lord did not emphasize neither praised one class, or one occupation over all others, but He recruited and even today He recruits an army of light from all classes, from all occupations and professions. For Him the criteria of man is not a crown nor a beggar's pouch, but rather faith - faith and good deeds. — **St. Nikolai, from the Prologue**

✠ **On Great and Holy Friday** ... the Lord went to battle for all of us broken and sinful people. As He breathed His last declaring "It is finished" He won the victory over Death and finished Creation by restoring it to the condition it was meant to be in. The Cross is His judgment Seat because judgment in Hebrew means to restore to the perfect state that Creation was intended to be, to heal, to make right and to declare the Acceptable Year of the Lord. — Dn. Stephen Griswold

## ***This and That***

It seems that our government has never given two flips about the welfare of Christians in the Middle East.  
- Rod Dreher

A memorable quote from French philosopher Regis Debray regarding the persecution of Eastern Christians:  
“The victims are ‘too Christian’ to excite the Left, and ‘too foreign’ to excite the Right.”

### **Rod Dreher: On his new book, “The Benedict Option:”**

...The danger we (the Church) face is that we seek to be so “relevant” to the culture outside the church that we lose what makes us distinct... The thrust of the Benedict Option project is to say that Christian life in the West, as it is presently constituted, is wholly unsuited for enduring the post-Christian order.

In the book (The Benedict Option), I write about the kind of life that lay Christians are called to lead now requires strategic withdrawal for the sake of culturing ourselves in Christianity, so when we go out into the world — where most of us are called to live — we can represent Christ authentically in a world where the pressures to abandon the faith are very strong. As Prof. Wilken says, this culture is no longer neutral about Christianity; it is positively opposed to it. A Christian who lives as if these are normal times is going to get steamrolled.

...We are headed to *Brave New World*. When people would rather surrender liberty than suffer pain, or even discomfort, we are well on our way to servitude. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism — a Christianity without the Cross — is the religion that prepares people for slavery. Real religion has done a poor job standing against “the capitalist juggernaut [that says] happiness is pleasure. Period.”

...In the West (though not elsewhere on the planet), we are living through the unraveling of the distinct web of meaning we call “Christianity”. We should not be surprised that Moralistic Therapeutic Deism has supplanted Christianity as the de facto religion of America; it is an attempt to hold on to some meaning, articulated in familiar religious concepts. But as Christian Smith has demonstrated, it is simply impossible to reconcile MTD with any version of historical Christianity. *It is a different religion.*

Re: the inconvenient truth that “Christianity” as a sociological fact is inevitably going to be whatever most people who call themselves Christians say it is. If you believe in some form of traditional Christianity, and believe it to be objectively true, then you have no realistic choice now but to form small communities of really convinced believers, and from that dense, thick community try to form the next generations with a resilient commitment to the traditional Story.

It’s not just about religion. We face the unraveling of the postwar world order, and within our own country, the fraying of the bonds that have historically united our diverse people. One has to hope that this process can be halted, but once people have lost a common Story — be it sacred or secular — it is hard to see how it can be easily reclaimed.  
- Rod Dreher, from his blog column

Reader’s Comment: “...Nobody, especially Christians, is ready to hear what you are saying. The end of Christian culture is too large to see, and the glimpses of what is to come looks fairly unpleasant—the reduction of human life into a commodity to be tinkered with, manipulated, bought and sold.”

### **STUDY: PUBLIC DISPLAYS OF MORAL OUTRAGE ARE TIED TO PERSONAL GUILT, NOT SOCIAL INJUSTICE**

~ A study published in the April 2017 edition of *Motivation and Emotion* confirms the tendency to enter a public arena and thump one’s chest about the latest moral outrage has far less to do with any actual concern about social injustice than it does a psychological need of the chest-thumper to alleviate their own tangled guilt complexes. Researchers Zachary Rothschild and Lucas Keefer found that “moral outrage at third-party transgressions is sometimes a means of reducing guilt over one’s own moral failings and restoring a moral identity.” They also found that the deeper one’s sense of personal moral failure is, the more likely they are to publicly persecute some third party for similar ethical transgressions. Remember - guilt is for the guilty.

# The Three Visits of Mary Magdalene to the Tomb of Christ

## Blessed Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky {+1936}



We have read various discussions about the apparent lack of accord among the Gospel narrations of Christ's Resurrection. There have been a number of attempts at demonstrating a concordance among the Evangelists in this regard, but not all have been successful. I wish to offer some considerations on the subject, and I wish to begin by mentioning the most obvious point of seeming lack of accord.

In Matthew's Gospel, we read that upon being greeted by the risen Lord with the word "rejoice," Mary of Magdala and the other Mary immediately embraced His feet. Nevertheless, we read elsewhere [John 20:11-17] that, when Mary of Magdala was weeping at the empty tomb and did not recognize Christ, but thought that He was the caretaker of the garden. When she did finally recognize Him, she was forbidden to touch Him. These narratives do not appear to conform with one another, and attempts of readers to reconcile them only produce strained interpretations and unconvincing contrivances.

The four Gospels do not describe the appearances of the Lord to the Myrrhbearing women in an identical manner. What most perplexes interpreters is the lack of accord between the accounts given by Matthew and John. It is evident that the Lord appeared to Mary of Magdala twice - once alone and the other time together with the other Mary - but the relationship of these two appearances perplexes interpreters. The thesis by which we intend to resolve this question may be expressed as follows: the Evangelist Matthew speaks of the journey of the two Marys to the Lord's tomb, already knowing that Christ had risen from the dead.

What Matthew is describing took place after the appearance described by John when Mary Magdalene had gone to the tomb and mistaken Christ for the gardener. She had informed the Apostles how she had seen the Lord and He had spoken to her, then she informed the other Mary, and both of them went to the tomb. They did not go at that time to anoint the body of Jesus, because they knew that He was risen, but they went "to see the tomb," knowing it to be empty, but knowing also that the winding strips in which He had been buried were still there. It was not only them and the two Apostles who rushed to the tomb to verify what Mary Magdalene had seen, but later, the other Myrrhbearers and more than eleven others also went (Luke 24:9, 24). The Evangelist informs us that the two Mary's were made worthy of a second appearance of the angel and then of the Lord Himself.

What other evidence do we have, besides Matthew's words that they went "to see the tomb," that the events in that Gospel took place after the events described in John's Gospel? The second evidence is that John describes the events that occurred "while it was yet dark," while Matthew clearly speaks of something that happened "at dawn on the first day of the week."

The third point which requires our attention is the reaction of the Myrrhbearers to the angel's words, and to Christ Himself. In John's Gospel, Mary appears so unprepared for the event that she cannot assimilate it and takes Christ for a gardener; in Mark's account, the angel's words bring the Myrrhbearers to such terror that they "said nothing to anyone because they were afraid." Luke writes that they were overcome with fear and prostrated themselves on the ground.

Matthew's narration, on the other hand, encounters the Myrrhbearers already prepared for the encounter, though the angel reassures them: "Do not be afraid. Go and see the place where the Lord lay." In Mark's Gospel, we read of the other myrrhbearing women that they "said nothing to anyone

because they were afraid." Matthew, however, relates of the two Mary's that they ran "with fear and joy to announce to His disciples" that He had risen. For Mary Magdalene, this was the second encounter, and the other Mary who knew about it from her receives the news again from the Savior Himself, being already prepared for it. From whence is this evident?

The answer to this is over fourth proof that the two women had gone to see the tomb already knowing about the Resurrection. This answer will also tell us why the Lord did not allow Mary Magdalene to touch Him the first time, but shortly after allowed both Mary's to embrace His feet.

In the Pentecostarion, on the Feast of the Myrrhbearing women, we read in the ninth Stikhera that Mary Magdalene, "...is sent away without touching Christ..." What does it mean? Mary, who had earlier wept over her beloved teacher, seeing Him buried, is now seized with an overwhelming joy. Without comprehending His divinity or thinking about the meaning of His mysterious resurrection, she forgets herself and wishes to embrace Him as one dear to her whom she thought to be dead and gone, but is now seen alive. She gives herself over to enthusiastic joy, without comprehension.

Moreover, something is not yet complete, for He must "ascend" to the Father. Later, the Lord behaves differently to the two Marys. This time, the two women are fully aware that the Lord is appearing to the faithful as the victor over death and Hades, as one ascending to the Father in the eternal Kingdom, and with all authority, sending the Apostles to preach the victorious struggle with the world. Now, both women, encountering him and hearing Him greeting, "rejoice," no longer think in a worldly manner, but reverence Him as the living Son of God. Thus, He does not prevent their reverent adoration as "embrace His feet and worship Him" (Matt 28:9).

Very well, we have seen the accord between the Gospels of Matthew and John, but how will we reconcile the narrative of the other two Evangelists? At what point will we place the arrival of Mary of Magdala with spices and myrrh, at the tomb, in the company of the other women mentioned in Mark and Luke?

The main point of our reply is that Mary Magdalene did not accompany the other women to the Lord's tomb with the spices, but the other women came after Mary had been there, and perhaps after the two Marys had seen the Lord at His second appearance, but they did not yet know about the Resurrection. These other women arrived completely unprepared for the revelation of the Resurrection, and there is no need to conclude that Mary Magdalene was with them; indeed, the Evangelists leave open the possibility of the opposite conclusion. Both the other Evangelists divide the narrative into three events:

1. The purchase of the Myrrh and spices (Mark) and the storing of them for later use (Luke);
2. The arrival at the tomb and conversation with an angel (Mark) or angels (Luke); and
3. The announcement to the Apostles.

Let us begin with this last event. It is not necessary to conclude from Mark's narration that the women did not ever inform the Apostles of the appearance of the angel. Mark only notes that they could not do so immediately, and that the Apostles heard the news from Mary Magdalene, to whom the Lord had "appeared first" (Mark 16:9). You see, Mark singles her out from the group of other Myrrhbearers and, consequently, separates the informing of the Apostles from the bringing of the spices and myrrh. Mark does not speak of her as participating in the bringing of the spices to the tomb, but only of her participation in the purchase of them (16:1) - which took place on Saturday evening, after the end of the Sabbath restrictions, that is, after the sixth hour.

Mary Magdalene went to the tomb alone "while it was still dark," and without the spices and myrrh. The other women came with the myrrh and spices "at sunrise" (16:2). The Lord did not appear to all of them but only to Mary Magdalene who, therefore, was not with the others (16:9). Mark names

those who purchased the spices and myrrh, and those who had watched the Lord's burial, but does not repeat the names when he speaks about the bringing of the spices to the tomb.

Luke does not name the ones who prepared the myrrh, nor the ones who brought it to the tomb, but indicates that the two groups were not identical ("together with some others" Luke 24:9). Evidently some of them had obtained myrrh and spices already on Friday after the Savior's death, but remained at rest on the Sabbath according to the Law (Luke 23:55), while others purchased myrrh and spices after the end of the prescribed Sabbath rest (Mark 16:1). Luke does not name the women who brought the spices, but only says of someone, "returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to the other disciples. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the Mother of James who told this to the Apostles" (Luke 24:10).

In fact, as John and Mark recall, it was Mary of Magdala who began the spreading of the Good News. Since the news was spread to all the disciples in addition to the Eleven; this did not happen all at once. The women had to go from house to house -- not only the two Marys, but the other Myrrhbearers as well. The testimony of Mary relates to the words of the third Gospel and the Gospel of John that Peter and John ran to the tomb. Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen winding strips.

Thus, the four Gospels are in perfect agreement on this succession of events:

- 1) Some of the women purchased spices and myrrh on Friday before the end of the day (Luke), while others, including Mary Magdalene, did so at the end of the Sabbath - after the sixth hour on Saturday (Mark).
- 2) Mary Magdalene left the others and went to the tomb at night before the morning of Sunday. There, she does not find the body of Christ (John).
- 3) She runs to tell Peter and John (Luke, John), and then stands alone outside the tomb weeping, when an angel appears to her, and then Jesus, Whom she does not recognize. She rushes to Him, but is not allowed to touch Him.
- 4) Obeying His command, she goes to announce the news to the Apostles (John, Mark) and the other disciples (Luke).
- 5) Not knowing about all this, the other Myrrhbearers come to the tomb and encounter the angels (Mark, Luke) and return too tearful to speak at first (Mark), but later also proclaim the news to everyone (Luke).
- 6) Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, already aware of the Resurrection, go to look at the tomb and the Lord's burial bandages, which Peter and John had seen (Luke, John), but which Mary herself had not seen for herself. Coming to the tomb, this time both Mary's enter it, as the angel advises them to (Matthew).
- 7) The angel now instructs them to confirm the news of the Resurrection to the disciples and announce the coming of Christ's Ascension.
- 8) Now fully comprehending the events, both Mary's hasten to find the Apostles again, but meet the Savior along the way, and this time, they are allowed to touch Him, embracing His feet (Matthew).
- 9) By the end of the day, not only the whole company of the Disciples, but even the Pharisees and scribes have heard the news. These latter begin to attempt to cover up the facts.

It is clear that the two Marys went to the tomb together after Mary Magdalene had already been there alone, and that both already knew of the Resurrection. ❖ ❖ ❖

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

*From the Prologue - April 5*

## HOMILY

### **About the fulfillment of the prophecy**

**"Because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor will thou suffer thy faithful One to undergo corruption" (Psalm 16:10).**

These are the words, the glowing prophetic words of the inspired discerner of mystery. This, David speaks about Christ the Lord, about His soul and about His body, i.e. about that which is human in Him. That these words of David pertain to the resurrected Christ was witnessed by the Apostle Peter in his first sermon immediately after the descent of the Holy Spirit: "Because you will not abandon my soul to the nether world nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption" (Acts of the Apostles 2:27). For the Apostle says, "about the patriarch David that he died and was buried and his tomb is in our midst to this day" (Acts of the Apostles 2:29). It is not possible that those words refer to David, although David speaks as though they are from him and refer to him, but rather those words refer to a descendant of David according to the flesh. The body of David is decomposed as are the bodies of his other descendants. Christ, therefore, is David's descendant in the flesh, Who, neither remained in Hades nor did His body see corruption. "He [David] foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah" (Acts of the Apostles 2:31). Truly, a glowing prophecy! Truly, a wondrous foresight! Before the resurrection of the Lord, these words must have sounded unintelligible and irrational for all the Jewish interpreters of the Psalms! When the seal on the tomb is removed, then the seal of the many, totally obscure and unclear prophecies, is also removed. Christ resurrects and the mysteries become known. The seal of the tomb is removed not only from His body but also from the countless words and visions of the Prophets. Christ resurrects and the prophetic words are also resurrected. Descending into Hades the Lord brought the heavenly light to the souls of the righteous Fathers and Prophets. By His Resurrection, He brought their words and visions to the light of understanding and truth. Christ resurrects and all that is good, righteous and truthful, before and after the resurrection morning, resurrected also.

**O, Resurrected Lord, place us among the resurrected citizens of Thine eternal Kingdom!**

*April 6*

## HOMILY

### **About the victory over the last enemy**

**"The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26).**

**Man's first enemy is the devil, the second is sin and the third is death. The Lord Jesus conquered all three of these enemies of the human race. By His humility, He conquered the proud devil. By His Death, He conquered sin and by His Resurrection, He conquered death. In conquering all of our enemies, He invites us to be partakers in His glorious victory. Not only that we conquer, but that we attach ourselves next to the Victor. Only His power conquers, only His weapons mow down. We are without power and weapons but our enemies are fearful. With Him and along side Him, we are conquering those mightier than ourselves. What is the price that He offers to us for His victory? A meager price, my brethren; for a very paltry price He offers us the most precious victory. To humble ourselves and to submit ourselves to the will of God, that is the price He seeks in order to conquer the devil for us. To die unto ourselves, to die to fleshly desires and passions, that is the price which He seeks in order to conquer for us. To live for Him and not for ourselves, to receive Him into our hearts, that is the price He seeks in order to conquer death for us. He conquered all enemies openly and completely. This is the price for which He offers His victory to each of us. The Apostle Paul speaks: "But thanks be to God Who gives us the victory through our Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).**

**O Resurrected Lord, enlighten, strengthen and heal us by Thy victory!**

**We who are grateful, lift up to Thee glory and thanks always! Amen.**

***What some consider the single greatest addiction that is shared by young Americans today: screens...***

Are addictions real? We talk as if they are. Many women say they are addicted to chocolate... In the early 90's, when crack was all the rage, one Christian pop singer encouraged young people to get off drugs and get "Addicted to Jesus."

What are we talking about?

The answer seems to be dopamine. It's a chemical substance—now there's a Nicene word that suggests reality! Specifically, dopamine is a "neurotransmitter that helps control the brain's reward and pleasure centers," as Psychology Today puts it. Researchers have long found connections between the brain's release of dopamine and particular activities—smoking, drinking, gambling. You do something (say, take a hit off a cigarette), and your brain releases dopamine, and the result is that you associate the reward of pleasure with the substance that provides it.

Of course, we need dopamine; it serves a purpose. Despite the best efforts of Planned Parenthood, few would deny that the feeling of reward or pleasure during sex helps to propagate the human race. The release of dopamine, researchers say, encourages "seeking" behavior, and when combined with memory, a person grows accustomed to the process of desiring something and obtaining it—setting and accomplishing a goal. Accomplishing goals is necessary to our survival: That steer won't just slaughter, butcher, age, season, sear, rest, and plate itself in a bed of caramelized onions, now will it? Psychologists and neuroscientists also know that there is a limit to the amount of dopamine we can handle. Too much of it makes us manic, causes anxiety, leads to compulsiveness, erratic behavior, insomnia, and paranoia. No functioning person can be high all of the time.

On the other hand, low levels of dopamine are said to be predictors of negative behavior. Folks who lack it may wallow in depression or discover an artificial or unnatural way of obtaining it, then get hooked on getting repeated doses of that artificial or unnatural means. They are addicts.

Getting hooked is a process that is fairly predictable. Adolescents who undergo trauma—the death of a loved one, a broken home—experience depression and, if they alleviate that depression by getting dopamine blasts through, say, the use of marijuana, they not only have created a chemical imbalance in themselves that requires a chemical solution but have "hard-wired" a behavioral pattern that leads them away from seeking healthy rewards (through work, meaningful relationships, studies, etc.).

Ethnographer Simon Sinek is becoming well known for lecturing on what some consider the single greatest addiction that is shared by young Americans today: screens, in the form of smartphones and tablets. He notes that Millennials (the generation roughly 30 years old and under) are particularly vulnerable to this because they have been reared by parents and teachers who constantly affirm them, which (perhaps unwittingly) has amounted to withholding from them the experience of working to achieve rewards and fostered in them an overall attitude of indifference. This malaise has been worsened by the stresses of adolescence, when children face the difficulty of forming friendships with their peers and the risk of rejection that goes along with it. The answer for them is then found right in their own hand, in the form of a cellphone. This "labor-saving" device offers the easiest possible dopamine hit, and in multiple ways. Every single text message that a teenager sends is a form of "seeking behavior," which looks for the reward of an immediate response—any response, according to Sinek. "Hi" is rewarded with a smiley face, and the pleasure center is activated. Social media is a more elaborate mechanism for the same dope hit, as likes, hearts, emojis, friend requests, PMs, retweets, comments, and shares are sought and obtained from the rising of the sun to the setting of

the same. Giving an iPhone to a teenager, says Sinek, is like recognizing that he is bummed out about losing the big game and handing him the keys to the liquor cabinet.

We might add that, if said iPhone can access porn—the dopamine capital of the World-Wide Web—it amounts to giving your teenager a thousand dollars and directions to a meth lab.

I will now break some urgent and important news: Millennials are not alone in this smartphone “addiction.” Generation X and our Baby Boomer parents—we’re all guilty of walking around, or sitting in meetings, or at dinner with our families, or even in church, heads bowed and fingers swiping. This servile pseudo-prayer without ceasing has become our self-medication against the ills and deformations of the modern world. So deeply has this culture-altering technology penetrated society that “phantom smartphone buzzing”—also connected to dopamine—is now a researched physiological phenomenon.

We’re all dope fiends now.

Yet there’s something deeper here that goes beyond technology and the science of addiction. Contrary to Darwinists, Marxists, social scientists, and other materialists, man is not a machine. Chemical processes are observable, quantifiable phenomena, but they represent and reflect invisible and immaterial realities of the soul. Of course, souls that part ways with their bodies are dead, and brain chemicals play a part in influencing or inclining our souls toward certain moral decisions. A drunk is more likely than a teetotaler to satisfy his dopamine cravings by spending his family’s monthly mortgage payment on Wild Turkey. But why is this an immoral choice to begin with? If man is merely an assemblage of matter, can such a thing as duty exist?

Are the walking dead responsible to provide for their families? Should we expect zombies to be civil at the dinner table?

What underlies all of the social science about the effects of smartphone addiction is an assumption about the good—what is right versus what is harmful for society. Yet the West (Americans included) is in denial about the very basis of the good. Having rejected Christianity (or having redefined it in therapeutic terms), we have no transcendent, fixed standard by which to measure good and evil beyond the leftover habits and conventions of our formerly ordered society that still (though decreasingly) hold sway over our likes and dislikes.

Those of us who believe that man has a nature, body and soul, created in the image of God, must look beyond the chemical processes of the brain and critically assess the things that shape and form us and our children. (This is the very definition of culture.) Above all else, as fallen men in a fallen world, we must enhance and not detract from our ability to hear the Word of God.

“The most appalling human sacrifice of Western society today is the toll taken by machine culture,” writes Richard Weaver (*Visions of Order, “Forms and Social Cruelty”*). “Our familiarity with these losses has caused us to accept them and to deaden our response to the horror of them.” What needs to frighten us all awake is the idea that we now have an entire generation that has been reared on smartphones, Kindles, iPads, and the like, and is habituated, body and soul, away from the written text, the sermon, the lecture, the essay, human conversation, and human interaction, and toward the instant gratification of buzzing, chirping electronic devices and ethereal networks and “communities” that are not real—a virtual reality in which cruelty is itself a virtue. It is a generation that fears silence, that is constantly stimulated in indifference and anxiety, that has no experience of true leisure, which (as Josef Pieper taught) is the basis of culture. With brains constantly doped up, and minds ever occupied with “messages” bounced off of towers and satellites and back into their hands, how will their souls hear the still, small voice of God? ....How will any of ours?