

Since there was not enough time to prepare another tomb, Joseph placed the Lord's body in the tomb that was meant to have been his own when that time came. This tomb was hewn out of rock, as the Evangelist Matthew says (Matthew 27:60).

What the myrrh-bearing women, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus did, was beyond brave. These were dark times for all who were followers of Jesus Christ. But the myrrh-bearing women, Joseph and Nicodemus were single-minded in their love for Jesus Christ.

They may have struggled with fear in their care for Jesus, they may have struggled with fear when they went to Jesus, especially as everyone else rejected Him, fled from Him, and denied Him in order to keep themselves from being condemned or persecuted.

But whatever fear they might have had, their love of Christ, and their love for Christ, compelled them to come to Jesus and to go forth proclaiming the Good News of His resurrection. They did this even as others tried to silence them. They did this even as they were threatened to be cast out of the Temple. They did this even as Christians began to be persecuted and killed for this faith we still proclaim today. They are a shining example of the strength of modesty, the courage of humility.

The women disciples of the Lord and the pious Joseph had courage because they loved Jesus; they trusted Jesus as God, and they feared God more than they feared man.

Their love for God was so much greater than their fear of any man and whatever might be done to them. So they went to the Lord, and then they went forth proclaiming the truth of His resurrection.

St. John Chrysostom writes, that Joseph, who was a member of the Council of the Jews, "exposed himself to death" so that he would be able to bury Jesus. The women disciples risked everything to go and anoint Christ. They risked being persecuted by their fellow unbelieving Jews. When the disciples fled, the women drew near with their love.

A Latin proverb says "Nihil novi sub sole", which means "There is nothing new under the sun", and this is also found in Ecclesiastes 1:9. In the world we

live in today we cannot but notice that being an Orthodox Christian is becoming more and more challenging.

Living out the truth of our faith may carry negative consequences for us in the world. You hear of people who are afraid to wear their cross at their places of work or who are afraid to cross themselves in public for fear of being perceived as “one of those Christians”, or for fear of being bullied or being passed over for promotion.

Increasingly, our Orthodox beliefs are coming under assault, religious liberties are being challenged. Intolerance for traditional Christianity, meaning that which is Orthodox, is increasing, there is no denying that.

Some people have experienced this intolerance first-hand; even some of our parishioners may have experienced this. A study by the Church of England found that the persecution of Christians is at an all-time high.

This Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing women should help us draw some lessons from their courage, living in a world where they faced great dangers for their faith in Christ.

We know that the Orthodox Faith is the same today as it was yesterday and as it will always be; because it is the truth of Christ revealed to His Church from the beginning. We continue to learn and grow in that faith, that truth, but that Faith has been “once delivered to the Saints” (Jude 1:3).

To be a faithful Orthodox Christian means that we do not change that ‘faith once received,’ but rather, become grafted into it, we enter into ever deeper communion with God through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we put on Christ in baptism (to use the language of St. Paul and the Church) and are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Chrismation, we are changed; we gain a new identity; we become part of the new race of Adam. And that identity supersedes everything: race, gender, rich, poor—for all are called to be one in Christ—fellow sinners are being healed, being saved, being deified.

It is our adherence to that new life in Christ in the fullness of His Church, that is Orthodox (‘right believing’), and this right faith unites us together. As we grow in our faith, we learn to accept the teachings of the Church not only because the Church says so, but because, through worship, teaching, prayer, and the Sacraments, the Truth is growing in us through the Spirit of Truth, the Holy

Spirit. It becomes ‘owned’ by us—not in an onerous or burdensome manner, but intuitively, freely, as we grow in the love of Christ and one another.

Now, let us just return back to life in the modern world: life in the modern world challenges us Orthodox Christians to such an extent that we may find ourselves ‘unpopular’, being labelled politically incorrect, narrow-minded, rejected by others, zealots, or worse.

And we all know that there is a great temptation to “fit in” with the majority and to compromise our faith. But we cannot be faithful Orthodox Christians, true to our Lord—growing and healing if we would embrace that which is contrary to the Orthodox Faith.

If we did this, we would create division in the Body of Christ; we would withhold healing from ourselves and others who need it just as we do. Christ is “a rock that makes men stumble and a stone that makes them fall” (I Pet. 2:8). There is simply no getting around it: without us increasingly changing into the likeness of Christ there is no growth in communion with God, there is no healing, no salvation.

So, today we keep the feast of those people who proved faithful, the ones who in their frailty did not flee, the ones who in the face of defeat and tragedy suddenly became disciples and faithful.

Let us remember them, not only seeing their glory as we have done today during the Divine Liturgy but also by asking ourselves: do we belong, to any extent, to the example given by any of them? Can we say that in the face of Christ’s defeat we would come out and say: I am one of His disciples, although, in the time when there was no danger around I just kept out, I was hesitant, unsure, asking myself questions, indeed asking Him questions?

Is any one of us like Joseph of Arimathea, is any one of us like Nicodemus, and can we say that we are like these myrrh-bearing women, whom neither the needs nor the defeat nor the death of Christ had been able to alienate from Him?

None of us is any of them fully; but let us learn from them and try to grow into that faithfulness which they have shown; the ones throughout the life of Christ, and the other ones in the face of His defeat. Amen.

CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!