

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church

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Rev. Presbyter Dragan Vukovic

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The Sunday of the Myrrhbearers (04.30.2023.)

Mark 15:43-16:8

Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus. And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre. And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid. And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid. (KJV)

Hristos Voskrese! Vaistinu Voskrese!
Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!
Hristos a inviat! Adevarat a inviat!

The joyous news of Jesus Christ's Resurrection is proclaimed in the present Gospel. The Myrrhbearing women heard the news. Believers around the world and down through the centuries have heard today's message from St. Mark's Gospel.

The famous fresco of the White Angel at Monastery Mileseva has preserved the image at the Tomb described in the present Gospel. Joy radiates in the hearts welcoming the message of Jesus Christ's Resurrection.

Believers taking the Gospel message to heart strive to live in ways pleasing to the Resurrected Christ. The Resurrected Christ personifies Hope and Light. Depression, despondency and despair have no place in believers' lives.

Jesus Christ eradicated death for those who believe in Him. St. John's Gospel states of Christ: "whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." (Jn. 3:15)

The Resurrected Christ gives believers power and hope to live in ways leading to the Kingdom of God and eternal life. Attentive believers look to the Resurrected Christ for daily direction and guidance.

The Resurrected Christ reveals Himself each day and points the way for believers to follow. God's Holy Church teaches believers of the path to the Heavenly Kingdom and eternal life.

St. John's Gospel contains Jesus' valuable words for believers. The Gospel states: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." (Jn. 5:39)

Living in the Resurrected Christ requires personal effort and attentiveness to Christ's teachings. The world unfolds each day according to the Lord God. Wise believers look to the Resurrected Christ each day of life for direction.

Believers are challenged each day to cherish and live in ways pleasing to the Lord. The time of life comes only once as a blessing from the Lord. Each moment is to be used wisely.

God's Holy Church offers the safe and nourishing environment for growth and unity with the Resurrected Christ. Exercising free choice wisely is necessary to move forward with Christ at each moment.

Evil is always present seeking to derail believers. The Resurrected Christ has shown that evil can be overcome. Christ's Light overcomes darkness. The Myrrhbearers in the Gospel were blessed to hear the enlightening news.

The Church constantly and resolutely proclaims the message and the meaning of the Resurrection. Believers derive strength and direction from the Divine services celebrating the Resurrection.

Saints and martyrs having taken the Resurrection most seriously have lived instructive lives for believers to learn from. The Mother of the Resurrected Lord offers nourishment, strength and intercession for believers seeking direction.

Serious prayer provides believers the opportunity to determine direction in daily life. The Church offers daily Scripture readings to nourish believers. Each day the Church sets forth saintly lives to inspire believers.

Resurrection joy cannot be contained and always finds a way to be manifested. Jesus Christ suffered and died on the Cross. Darkness appeared to triumph. The Darkness was temporary. The Brightness of the Resurrection arose.

God's Holy Church has proclaimed and celebrated Jesus' Resurrection for more than twenty centuries. Efforts have not been successful to discredit the news of Jesus rising from the dead.

Believers have the Life-giving information about the Resurrection given to the Myrrhbearers at the Tomb. No darkness in life can take away the Light of Christ from the hearts of believers. Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

The Sunday of the Myrrhbearers. Holy Hieromartyr Simeon, Bishop of Persia and Those with Him. April 17/30, 2023. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania.

Father Rodney Torbic

HOMILY ON THE SUNDAY OF THE MYRRH BEARING WOMEN. ON SPIRITUAL DEADNESS



The White Angel by the tomb. 8th century fresco, Serbia.

The Gospels have told us today^[1] about the exploits of the holy women who followed the God-Man during His earthly wanderings. They witnessed His sufferings and were present at his burial. The burial took place on Friday evening. While the Jews' wrath was pouring out like the fiery lava of Aetna not only upon the Lord, but upon all of those close to Him; while the Holy Apostles were forced to hide or observe the extraordinary events only from a distance; while only John, the beloved disciple who leaned upon the breast of the Lord, feared nothing and remained always near the Lord, the secret disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, who had always concealed his heart's allegiance due to persecution from the Sanhedrin, suddenly disregards all the obstacles, hesitations, and anxiety that had bound and worried him until then, and he appears before cold, cruel Pilate to beg the body of the One who was shamefully executed. He receives the Lord's body and buries it with reverence and honor.

The Gospels imply that Joseph's deed was big-hearted and courageous. That is truly what it was. In the presence of the Sanhedrin which had committed deicide, in the very Jerusalem that had participated in that deicide, a member of the Sanhedrin takes the body of the God-man killed by men down from the tree and carries it to the garden located near the city gates and walls. There, in quiet and solitude, under shady trees, he places the body by which the bodies and souls of all

mankind are redeemed in a new tomb hewn from a solid rock, with an abundance of fragrances and oils, and wraps it like a precious treasure in fine, clean linen. Another member of the Sanhedrin also took part in the Lord's burial. This was Nicodemus, who came to the Lord by night and acknowledged that the Lord was sent from God. Having rolled a great stone to the door of the grave—doors which Gospels call a low opening to the cave—Joseph has satisfactorily finished his service and so he departs. The Sanhedrin followed Joseph's movements. Seeing him gone, it took care to set a guard at the grave and place a seal on the stone which covered the entrance. The Lord's burial was witnessed by both His friends and His enemies. Although some members of the Sanhedrin in their frenzy and rage committed a great evil, they unconsciously brought a great sacrifice (cf. Acts 17:18): through the slaughter of the all-pure Sacrifice they redeemed the whole human race, ended the fruitless number of transformative sacrifices, and made these sacrifices and their very institution superfluous. Other members of the Sanhedrin, representatives of all the righteous people of the Old Testament, served with a God-pleasing intention and disposition of soul in the burial of the Redeemer of mankind, and by this action ended and placed a seal upon the pious works of the sons of the Old Testament. From this point begins the exceptional service of those of the New Testament.

The holy women show no less courage than the selfless Joseph. Present at the burial on Friday, they did not deem it permissible on the Sabbath—the day of rest—to disrupt that peace in which the body of Christ rested in sacred darkness and reclusion within the sepulchral cave. The women were intent upon pouring out their zeal for the Lord by pouring myrrh upon His body. When they returned from the burial on Friday, they immediately bought a goodly amount of aromatic substances and waited for the break of the day which follows the Sabbath, then called the “week,” now Sunday. On that day, as soon as the sun shone forth, the pious women went to the grave. On the way they remembered that a large stone had been rolled to the grave. This worried them, and the women began to say amongst themselves, *Who shall roll the stone from the tomb for us?* (Mk. 16:2). The stone was *very great*. Having arrived at the tomb, they saw to their amazement the stone rolled away. A light-bearing mighty angel had rolled it away: at the Lord's resurrection, he had descended from heaven to the grave which encompassed Him whom the heavens cannot encompass, stunned the guards with terror, broke the seal, and rolled away the stone. He sat on the stone, waiting for the women's arrival. When they came, he announced the Lord's resurrection to them, telling them to inform the Apostles. For their zeal for the God-man, for their resolve to render honor to the all pure body that was guarded by the military guard, after which the Sanhedrin in their hatred sharply watched, the holy women were the first among humans to receive exact and sure testimony of Christ's resurrection; they were made the first strong preachers of the resurrection, as ones who heard about it from the lips of the angel. The all-perfect God is impartial: for Him all people are equal. And those people who strive toward Him with great self-denial are made worthy of a special abundance of Divine gifts and spiritual elegance.

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*.^[2] 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).[4]

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.

St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov)



Hieromartyr Branko Dobrosavljevic

Branko Dobrosavljevic was born in the village of Skadar near Vojnic on January 4, 1886. He completed Grammar school as well as the Seminary in Sremski Karlovci in 1908. He was ordained deacon on March 15, and presbyter on March 22, 1909. He performed his duties in the villages of Buvaca, Radovica and Veljun. Branko received St. Sava's Order and Yugoslav Crown Order of the Fifth Degree.

On the Feast of St. George, May 6, 1942, - the very day of his own Slava - Branko was arrested by the Ustase, headed by Ivan Sajfor from Veljun. Over 500 Serbs were arrested that day, among them Dimitrije Skorupan, parish priest of Cvijanovic Brdo, and Nebojsa, priest Branko's son. At first they were imprisoned in police station in Veljun, and next day (May 7) they were taken away and killed in the woods called "Kestenovac", near Hrvatski Blagaj. The Ustase forced priest Branko to perform the service for the repose of the soul of the dead to his own son Branko, who was alive at the time. In 1946 priest Branko's martyr relics and the remains of the other killed Serbs were transported to a common grave in Veljun.

At the regular session of the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, priest Branko Dobrosavljevic was canonized and his name was entered into the List of Names of the Serbian Church Saints.

Services this Week

- ❖ **Friday – 05.05.2023 – PARACLESIS - THE OFFICE OF SUPPLICATION TO SAINT NECTARIOS -05:00 PM – Confession**
- ❖ **Saturday - 05.06.2023 - Holy Glorious Great-martyr George - 09:30AM Divine Liturgy**
- ❖ **Sunday – 05.07.2023. - 4th Sunday of Pascha – of the Pralytic-Venerable Branko of Vojnic ande Veljun- 10:00AM Divine Liturgy**

Donations April 23, 2023

Offering - \$ 1,183.00 Candles - \$83.00

Dues - \$150.00 Donations - \$100.00

Building Fund

In Memory Of Amelia Moncilovich

Mitchell & Lisa Saula - \$50

and Sylvester Gjurich - \$25

In Memory of Linda Palmer

Highmark Family - \$175, Bill & Stacy Locher - \$100

Joe Bartis - \$50, Michael & Mary Raich - \$50, Robert Thomas - \$50

Eli Cvijanovich – \$25, Helene Gleason - \$25, Lazo & Debbie Gjurich - \$25

Sylvester Gjurich - \$25

Tony & Linda Freidhoff & Joanne Uzelac - \$20, Richard Kondas - \$20

Dan Lovrich - \$20, Dan & Dyne Tomak - \$20

Kathy Urban - \$10

Large Candles

In Memory of Mike & Mildred Tumbas from Kathleen McDowell

In Memory of Bosiljka & Lazo Vuckovich from Dan & Dyne Tomak

In Memory of Julia & Demetrias Lambrinos from Dan & Dyne Tomak

In Memory of Andrew Grisin from Richard Kondas

In Memory of Damenja & Lazo Gjurich from Diane and Dan Tomak

In Memory of Connie Bartis from Bartis & Pavich Family

PLEASE TAKE YOUR FLOWERS AFTER DIVINE LITURGY TODAY AND/OR HELP WATER

THE REMAINING FLOWERS TO KEEP THEM BEAUTIFUL!!!

There will be a Kolo meeting today, Sunday, April 30th following Divine Liturgy

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sunday, May 21st – Anniversary Celebration

Please make plans to join your Parish Family for this annual celebration.

Banquet to follow Divine Liturgy

(Adults \$20 – Sunday School Children Free)

Spring graduates please contact Rose Marinkovich or Suzette Gardenhour

Polka-Fest June 2-4, 2023

Band of Brothers – July 13-15 & 19-22, 2023

JOIN US FOR



Taste of Serbia – August 12, 2023



Slavic Festival – September 15-16, 2023