

THE MYRRHBEARING WOMEN IN THE GOSPELS

Jesus could have first revealed His Resurrection to anyone, but remarkably He chose a group of faithful women. These women, despite the risk they were taking, went to anoint Jesus's body in the tomb. They had no idea how the rock in front of the tomb would be removed, but their faith and love made them set out anyway. They were the first witnesses to the Resurrection—the first to share it with the world! Although they loved the Lord so much and had such great courage, it is remarkable to see how their faith was still limited. They did not yet believe in the Lord's words concerning His Resurrection. Every- thing else Jesus had foretold about Himself had happened: His passion, the cross, and death. Yet, His words that He would arise from the dead had not yet penetrated their hearts. We understand from this that faith in the Resurrected Lord is ultimately a gift we receive from the Lord Himself. He reveals Himself to us as our Resurrected Lord. The lives of the Myrrhbearing Women, as well as the lives of all the apostles and saints through- out the centuries, were fundamentally and permanently changed by belief in His victory over sin, death, and the devil.

Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy nobleman who asked Pilate for the body of Jesus and buried Him in his own tomb, perhaps saving His body from being thrown into a pit after death as was done with criminals (which is what Jesus was considered). Nicodemus was a leader among the Jews, a Pharisee who believed in Jesus and visited Him in private. For their roles and obedience to Jesus Christ, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus along with the Myrrhbearing Women are commemorated as saints of our church.

Tradition, through Sacred Scripture, preserves these names as the women who came to anoint their Lord on Easter Sunday morning:

- Mary Magdalene, whose name Magdalene means from the town of Magdala.
- Mary, the wife of Cleophas and mother of James.
- Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, Chuza, who held an important position under King Herod. Joanna is credited with rescuing the head of John the Baptist from Herod's court. She abandoned a life of luxury and power to follow Jesus.
- Salome, the mother of the sons of Zebedee, the Apostles James and John. They left a comfortable life to walk with Jesus.
- Susanna, known only as one of the women who supported Jesus financially.
- Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who sat at Jesus' feet at Bethany and anointed Him before Palm Sunday.
- Martha, the other sister of Lazarus, who was "busy with details of hospitality" but after the raising of Lazarus testified to her faith in Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah.

St. Luke writes that there were "many women who followed Jesus." These were women who came from lives both ordinary and even of privilege – Joanna being from a palace – but who also had the courage to break out of the traditional life of Jewish women in that time and publicly follow this Rabbi.

For Consideration

- What did the women in the Gospel set out to do? Why was this such a difficult task? Why did the empty tomb present for them a problem? What caused them to tremble and be amazed?
- Who are Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus? What caused them to tremble and be amazed?
- What does this Gospel passage mean for our lives?

TO DO TOGETHER

The Myrrhbearing Women

The Myrrhbearers are called “Apostles to the Apostles; the First Preachers of the Resurrection.” As a family, learn more about each of these amazing women. Who were they? How did they continue to proclaim the Gospel of Christ after His Resurrection?

Nicodemus

Learn more about Nicodemus by looking up his name in the Bible. As a family, read the different accounts of Nicodemus’ interactions with Christ. Talking to Nicodemus, Jesus used the phrase, “unless one is born again” (John 3:13). Discuss the phrase interpretation of the phrase “born again” as Jesus Christ described. For further clarification, speak with your parish priest.

Honoring the Dead

The Myrrhbearers went to the Lord’s tomb with the intention of anointing His body—to honor the dead. As a family, consider what you do to honor those who have fallen asleep in the Lord. Do we occasionally visit their graves to do simple maintenance? Do we make sure they have a vigil candle lit? Do we offer their names at appropriate times to be memorialized in the Church (All Souls Services)? Do we keep their “memory eternal” by sharing stories with one another? Do we keep them in our prayers? What can we do better? It is a pious custom to visit the graves of our departed loved ones especially after Easter and to greet them saying “Christ is Risen!”

FINAL THOUGHT

As St. John Chrysostom said: Remember how the women had followed Him, ministering to Him, and were present even to the time of the dangers. Remember how they stood at the foot of the cross and saw it all: how He cried, how He gave up His spirit, how the rocks split, and all the rest. These women were the first to see Jesus; the gender of Eve who brought death to the world is the first to enjoy the sight of the Resurrection. When the disciples had fled, these women were present ... Do you see their courage? Do you see their affection? Do you see their noble spirit in matters of money? Do you see their noble spirit even unto death?