

The Holy Myrrh-bearing Women

A sermon of Fr. Sergei Sveshnikov, Mulino, Oregon

[On the second Sunday following Pascha], the Church celebrates the memory of the Holy Myrrh-bearing Women. The holy women were faithful disciples of Christ and always remained near the Lord in His earthly service. They listened to his preaching in Galilean synagogues, walked with Him to Jerusalem, were present at the resurrection of Lazarus, cried with the Mother of God at the foot of the Savior's Cross and followed Joseph and Nicodemus to the tomb. They spent the hours following the Crucifixion in pain and agony with what was left of the Lord's disciples. Undoubtedly, their hearts burnt with the desire to run to the Lord, but they observed the Sabbath with other Jews "because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity" (John 19:31 NRSV).

Yet the sacred day of the Sabbath of the Great Stillness came to an end, and with the first rays of the rising sun, having gathered all that was necessary for burial, the holy women hurried to Him, whom alone their hearts desired, to their beloved Teacher (Mark 16:2). Did they believe in the resurrection of the Savior? Did they remember the sermons of the Teacher? Did they recall the festive entrance of the King into the Holy City and the children singing, "Hosanna! Blessed is the One Who comes!" (John 12:13)? Even if they still had any hope for a miracle, like that of the resurrection of Lazarus, this hope was now lying mocked, spit upon, broken, crucified, pierced with a spear, in the tomb with their beloved Teacher. The Holy Myrrh-bearers walked to the tomb with perfumes and burial cloths (Luke 24:1), not processional banners, to prepare a dead man for his last journey, not to meet the risen God. The sorrow of the holy women was so great, that even when they saw the wide open tomb they did not understand what had happened (Luke 24:4), even having seen the risen Lord, Mary Magdalene thought that He was the cemetery gardener (John 20:15). But the faithfulness of the Holy Myrrh-bearers to the

Lord was so great, that they walked to Him in the dark (John 20:1) despite the guards who were ordered to keep the disciples away from the Body (Matthew 27:64), they walked despite the large stone which lay in their way to the Teacher (Matthew 27:66), they walked despite all odds.

For their faithfulness the holy women became the apostles to the Apostles and brought to them the good news of the resurrection (Luke 24:9). Even before the Evangelists picked up their pens, before the Apostles walked to the far reaches of the Empire with the sermon, before Peter proclaimed the good news to thousands on the day of Pentecost, the Myrrh-bearers brought to the Apostles the first proclamation, and the first sermon, and the first Gospel. How often in our lives we lose our faith when we must go through illness, inconvenience, suffering, and sorrow. At times it seems to us that our God is dead, that He does not hear us, that some armed people do not let us through, or that there is a large stone in our path and "who will roll away the stone for us...?" (Mark 16:3 NRSV). So we sit shut up in our pain and sorrow, hiding in fear (John 20:19).

Yet the Holy Myrrh-bearers bring the good news to us as well, "Arise from your sinful slumber! With the first ray of sun, run to the Lord!" And what do we see? We are too late with our tears and burial ointments—the tomb is empty! No, God does not even run out to meet us half-way (Luke 15:20)—He completed everything that is needed for our salvation: he already broke the bonds of hades and defeated death. He already goes ahead of us to Galilee (Matthew 28:7)—His homeland. All that is left for us at the empty tomb is his message: do not be afraid, hurry, tell everyone, the Lord is waiting for you at home (Matthew 28:10). Through the prayers of the Holy Myrrh-bearing Women, Lord, grant us their all-conquering faithfulness to You! Amen.

MUSIC & POETRY, JUNE 5:

Share your performing talents on this Fast Free Friday evening at the ST. SERAPHIM SALON. Sing – Play – Read – Celebrate! Potluck meal with spaghetti and salad provided begins at 6:00 PM. Sign up to perform and to dine: Vladimir, 707 479-9437, ursusmjr@sonic.net.

Parish of the Protection of the Holy Virgin
St. Seraphim of Sarov Church
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Parish office phone: 707-584-9491
website: www.saintseraphim.com

Our Parish Secretary—Bobbi Griovski—may be reached at the Church office Mon., Tues. and Wed., 9 AM to Noon, at 584-9491. Fr. Lawrence Margitich may be reached at the Parish office phone, or at Lmargitich@sbcglobal.net. He is available Tuesday–Saturday, from noon onwards each day.

Parish Contacts

Fr. Michael Margitich, Pastor Emeritus	473-0314
Fr. John Schettig, Second Priest	318-1559
Serge Anderson, Parish Council Warden	291-7452
David Winterton, Treasurer	331-9085
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The Cross and South Gate at the Protection Church

Enter by the narrow gate...Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matt 7:13-14)

The current south gateway at the Protection of the Holy Virgin Church is a restoration with some minor interpretations. The Protection Church originally had a redwood picket fence, painted white like the Church, which surrounded the immediate grounds. At some time between 1936 and the late 1960s, a south-facing gateway, cross and a swinging gate were added. The original gateway was a simple beam across two vertical posts. The cross was attached to the center of the crossbeam. The unique cross can be seen on the gateway in photos dating to the 1960s. This cross was created by Nikos Pritoala-Georgenson one of the Parish's founders, who was also a member of the choir. To date, we have found no specific record of why he built the cross this way, though there are a number of references in the Akathist to the Cross (see below) that seem to parallel its unique features: a crown, side bars or fins and four tongues of fire emanating from its center. It was painted white like the Protection Church and fence. During the building of St Seraphim's Church, it became necessary to move the Protection Church West about 20'. The Church was raised, moved and a placed on a new foundation. This allowed the current large colonnade leading to St Seraphim's to be built between the priest's residence and the eastern end of the Protection Church. The movement and construction of the colonnade required that the eastern side of the fence with a unique gateway be removed. The

southern and western sides of the fence were taken out as well. The builder of the eastern gateway and the interpretation of its structure are unknown at this time. Before Glendi in 2014, a new section of picket fence on the west side of the Church was built to keep children from entering into the roadway. Some of the old fence on the north side was replaced at this time as well. The south gateway and cross, now missing its swinging gate, were between two large and aging trees and was disconnected from any fencing. Some restoration of the fence began in late 2014 including connecting gaps in the fence, cleaning and painting, extending the fence around the southwest corner and connecting it to the original south gateway. This continues into 2015. The old south gateway and cross were removed, a diseased tree was taken out and the fence extended to the south to connect a new south gateway. The new south gateway was built using the design from the old eastern gateway, with small modifications. Because the old cross was not repairable, it was rebuilt from scratch using African Mahogany, Teak and Ironwood. Though the old cross was simply painted white, the new cross was painted based on the interpretations from the *Akathist to the Holy Cross*, including:

"...seeing it now brilliantly shed light-bestowing Grace on the faithful...Rejoice, torch of radiance above!" *Ikos 1*

"Rejoice, four-rayed shining and fire-like Cross! Rejoice, ladder set on high, forseen of old." *Ikos 2*

"Rejoice, O Cross, vessel of light!" *Ikos 3*

"Like the sun did the Cross appear to the world, and all men were filled with its light. *Ikos 4*

"Having beheld the God-crowned tree, let us come under its protection." *Kontakion 5*

"A ladder as lofty as Heaven is the Cross of the Lord become, leading all from the earth to the height of Heaven..." *Kontakion 6*

Rejoice, O Cross, doorway to mysteries! Rejoice, that from which divine streams pour forth!" *Ikos 6*

"The radiance that giveth light to them in darkness doth this life-giving Cross bestow; for it hath shown us the immaterial light, and hath illumined the way for all to divine knowledge. Rejoice, luminary that shineth on them in darkness! Rejoice, lightening that doth blind the slayers of Christ!" *Ikos 11*

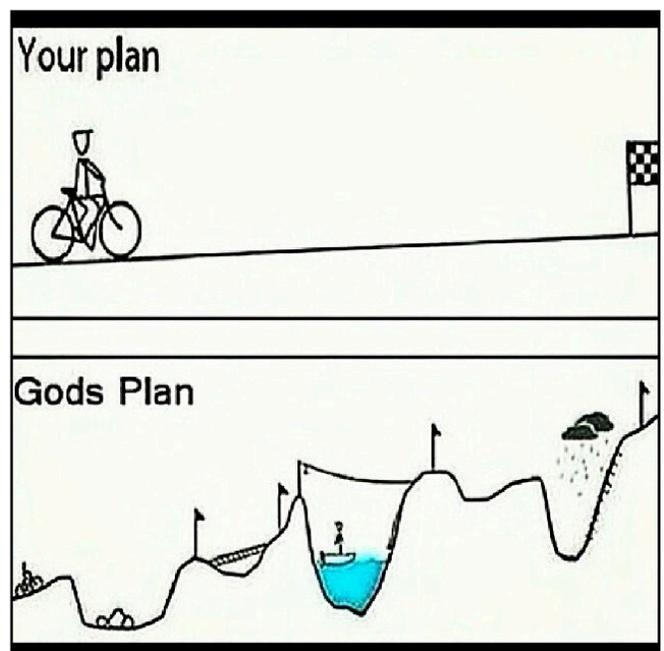
"Rejoice, beauty and crown of pious Kings! Rejoice, thou lamp of purest light!" *Ikos 12*

—Ray Basch

Parish Council Minutes ~ March 19, 2015

We began with the singing of “O Heavenly King” at 7 PM. *Attending:* Fr. Lawrence Margitich, Bonnie Alexander, Serge Anderson, Debbie Buse, Kristine Tellefsen, Dennis Campbell, Rachael Dovey, Amy Margitich, Tom Pellizzer, Tito Ramirez, Alex Stameroff and David Winterton. Anthony Scott attended as a guest. *Absent:* Fr. John Schettig, Kira Staykow (Sisterhood President), Thom Stewart

1. February 19, 2015 meeting minutes were accepted with minimal changes related to attendees
2. Rector's Report:
 - a. Received a request to post a fundraising letter to the SSPF for the Brodeurs—special needs of the family. After discussion we decided that the most effective way to deal with this is to ask Sarah Hamner to set up an account on GoFundMe.com and we will post her letter and link on the SSPF. The church will make donation from the Charity Fund in the amount of \$500 Tom Pellizzer/Debbie Buse. Motion passed unanimously.
3. Treasurers' Report
 - a. February 2015 Financials: David Winterton shared graphs that showed comparisons of income and expenses for the past fourteen months and Net income trends over the same period. This was to show that even though the P & L reflects a negative net income, overall we are doing just fine.
4. Sisterhood Report—No report
5. Grounds and Ongoing Maintenance:
 - a. St. Seraphim Water Intrusion: Duplex Septic and Interior -- Grace's unit will be completed this week. Thanks expressed to Serge Anderson and his crew.
 - b. Lawn next to Hall: we need some landscaping and irrigation sources. Serge will speak with Tomas who did some other work for us.
 - c. Gazebo Restoration: Someone suggested this project and Fr. Lawrence has asked this person to head it up. Serge suggested that Mat. Ann be consulted since the Gazebo will be moved due to landscaping changes.
 - d. Rector/Secretary Offices Construction: Progress is being made on the construction. Many thanks to Serge and to Tom Pellizzer who spent many hours on this project.
 - e. Moving Library and rearranging Sunday School Room: Brief discussion of proper use of the space being vacated in the Sunday School building.
6. Old Business:
 - a. Facilities Manager: Tito Ramirez agreed to assume this responsibility.
7. New Business:
 - a. Fr. Lawrence presented opportunities to serve during Holy Week: Candle Desk Attendants and Church Cleaners—sign-up sheet was circulated (Pascha/Holy Saturday Repast; Pascha Picnic) sign-up sheet was circulated
 - b. May 1 target for moving the office to the new office.
 - c. Fr. Lawrence vacation June 15-30
 - d. Men's Group/Breakfast: It has been proposed to have a monthly men's breakfast. Initial meeting to make arrangements will be Sunday, April 19.
 - e. Next meeting: Thursday, April 23, 2015 at 7:00 PM
8. Meeting adjourned with the singing of “It is Truly Meet to Bless Thee” at 7:50 PM



EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- WE HONOR our Parish Sisterhood on their patronal Feast of the Myrrhbearing Women, and thank God for the good work done here in the parish by all the Sisterhood members. Many Years!
- SVETLANA and JAMES Clark will prepare our Agape Meal on Sunday, April 26, in honor of the Holy Myrrhbearers. Svetlana asked and received a blessing from His Eminence Vladyka Benjamin to make a presentation to our parish about the Abbess Markella and the Monastery of the Life-Giving Spring in Dunlap, CA. and some of their financial needs.
- ABOUT FIFTEEN PARISH MEN met on Sunday, April 19, to form the new "Protection of the Holy Virgin Men's Group." The purpose of the Men's Group is varied: service projects (to assist our local monasteries, parishioners in need, and parish projects); pilgrimages (monastery, venerating the Relics of St. John in SF and a ballgame, etc) and time together. The group will gather for breakfast on Saturday, May 2 at the Happy Hen Diner on Santa Rosa Ave. All parish men and teenagers are welcome.
- SLAVYANKA CHORUS : On Sunday, May 3rd, San Francisco's Slavyanka Chorus will present "Russian Spirit, Russian Land," a concert of sacred hymns and secular songs from Russia's timeless musical traditions: Ancient monastic chants, rousing Cossack songs, liturgical hymns from some of Russia's greatest composers, known and unknown, and much of it almost never heard outside Russia. The performance will be at 3 PM at the Glaser Center (547 Mendocino Avenue, Santa Rosa). Tickets may be purchased at www.slavyanka.org or at the door.
- UPCOMING HOLY MYSTERIES: Miriam Brodeur, newborn baby of Anastasia and Aaron Brodeur, will be baptized on Sunday, May 24 at 9 AM. All are invited to come and rejoice with them. Later that day—3 PM—Gregory Skopp and Becka Tolbert from Holy Dormition on Rose Ave. will be joined in Holy Matrimony. Greg is Fr. David and Elizabeth Skopp's son (you've seen Greg play Scrooge many times) and Becka is Fr. Philip and Junia Tolbert's daughter. We wish them Many Years of happiness.
- ON HOLY SATURDAY WE baptized three catechumens—Miguel, Seraphim (formerly known as Spencer) and Lars—and received a new catechumen, Cristina Legorreta from Ukiah. May the Lord richly bless them all.
- DURING THE PASCHAL SEASON we do not use the prayer "O Heavenly King, Comforter..." but instead, say "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling..." We also do not do prostrations until the Vespers of Pentecost.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST: Orthodox Christians wouldn't dream of missing Church on the feasts Christmas, Holy Saturday, Pascha, etc. The importance of these days is self-evident. However, even though it is mentioned in the Creed, the Feast of the Ascension of Christ does not seem to occupy a place of honor in the worship practices of most Orthodox Christians. The Feast is always on a Thursday—Forty Days after the Resurrection (see Acts 1)—and never on a Sunday. Ascension is the vindication of the crucified, buried and risen Lord Jesus, the initiation of His reign over all creation, and His power made present in us. "It is the glorified flesh of the Incarnate Word of God which has entered into the very bosom of the Trinity in the Person of Christ. St Leo the Great remarked that Ascension is the day "on which our poor human nature was carried up, in Christ, above all the hosts of Heaven, above all the ranks of angels, beyond the highest Heavenly powers to the very throne of God the Father." This is simultaneously our ascension and our glorification, since we are united to Christ through holy Baptism as members of His Body. Mark your calendars for the Feast on May 21!

MY TRAVEL PLANS FOR 2015: I have been in many places, but I've never been in Kahoots. Apparently, you can't go alone. You have to be in Kahoots with someone. I've also never been in Cognito. I hear no one recognizes you there. I have, however, been in Sane. They don't have an airport; you have to be driven there. I have made several trips there, thanks to my children, friends, family and work. I would like to go to Conclusions, but you have to jump, and I'm not too much on physical activity anymore. I have also been in Doubt. That is a sad place to go, and I try not to visit there too often. I've been in Flexible, but only when it was very important to stand firm. Sometimes I'm in Capable, and I go there more often as I'm getting older. One of my favorite places to be is in Suspense! It really gets the adrenalin flowing and pumps up the old heart! At my age I need all the stimuli I can get! I may have been in Continent, but I don't remember what country I was in. It's an age thing. They tell me it is very wet and damp there.

Joyful With Those Who Wait In Hope

The second Tuesday after Pascha it is common for Orthodox to visit cemeteries to share the joy of Easter with the departed, just as Christ must have done when he “descended into Hades” first thing after His Resurrection. In our area it is a strong tradition among parishes and monasteries, and I learned to love this trip to the cemeteries early in my life as an Orthodox Christian.

Until this year I had only visited one of the many cemeteries that are included on this day, but now that my own husband lies “newly reposed” in a different one, I wanted to go and sing “Christ is risen!” by his grave as well. Priests from two Orthodox churches arrived unintentionally at the same time and led the service next to the graves.

Up the road a few miles at the next stop—the Forestville Cemetery—we were met by Nina Antipova who was waiting by the graves of members of her family. I saw on the marker that her husband died when I was still a child. Through the oaks down the hill we could see Father Alexander Krassovsky singing Paschal hymns with two women at a gravesite.

The Forestville cemetery is of the old and non-endowed sort, where you are lucky if once a year some community organization chops down the larger weeds. And there is concrete, lots of it, in big broken squares and rectangles of curbs and cracked slabs over and around family groupings. I had forgotten about the hilliness, and about this difficulty of standing and walking on uneven concrete surfaces, and my ankles began to hurt. Note to self: No *Danskos* next time.

Besides the concrete, in the unpaved areas there are often foxtails and dust. But flowers grow in the cracks even in drought, and the rockrose that was planted long ago is vigorous. Last year it was really hot on *Radonitsa* (the Slavic word for this “Day of Rejoicing”) but today it was cool and drizzly, so our shoes got wet on the lawns.

We didn’t have a big crowd at any of the cemeteries. A different group showed up at each place, with the most people at the third one—the Healdsburg Cemetery—including Mother Susanna and the Sisters from Kazan Skete, and the “myrrh-bearing women” with her, some originally from Bulgaria, Ukraine, and Russia, where they know and practice the traditions of *Radonitsa*. Evgenia, my

new friend from Ukraine, said that in her country they bring tables and chairs to the cemetery so that they don’t have to rush off, and they picnic on festal foods while they think a while longer about death, the resurrection and God. They like to leave food on the graves (shells of easter eggs too), for poor people to pick up later on.

When I came home and read again about the *Day of Rejoicing*, I found that “the Slavs, like many ancient peoples, had a tradition of visiting family members’ graves during the springtime and feasting together with them.” It was an easy custom to continue after their conversion to Christianity, a faith that gave them a truly joyful message to bring along with the food, about Christ’s life-giving death.

The Healdsburg Cemetery has an endowed section with flat grave markers, on an even lawn, down the hill from where Archimandrite Dimitri and others are buried, and we all trailed over there on the paths between the large square plots, to finish the service near those newer graves. As we walked we sang the Paschal Stichera *Let God Arise*.

Not far off a group of three people we didn’t know was gathered around a gravesite that was heaped with flowers; one woman obviously weeping. They watched and listened to us as we faced their direction and sang the Paschal and Panikhida hymns enthusiastically, and when Father Lawrence walked around censing and blessing the graves with holy water as he sang, he went as far as the grave they were standing next to, and sprinkled water on it too, just very naturally.

When we finished our hymns we went to talk to them; the woman’s mother had died. Maybe the two men were her husband and son. She kept telling us in Spanish, “Thank you!” through her tears, and we exchanged hugs and repeated greetings of “Christ is risen!” “Cristo ha resucitado! Verdaderamente, ha resucitado!”

Some of us had colored eggshells, left over from Pascha, to sprinkle on the graves. I hope to be ready next year, as I’ve conceived a plan, to make use of the blooms of our big snowball bush (*viburnum*) which are usually at their peak about this time. On the graves of those awaiting the Resurrection, they would be a lovely adornment.

—Gretchen McPherson

TROPARION OF THE MYRRH-BEARERS, Tone Two: The angel came to the myrrh-bearing women at the tomb and said: Myrrh is meet for the dead; but Christ has shown Himself to be a stranger to corruption, so, proclaim: the Lord is risen! Granting the world great mercy.

PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

MAY 2015

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
April 26 – Myrrhbearers • 9 AM, Confessions • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal	27	28	29 • 11 AM, Catechism Revisited • 6 PM, Vespers	30 • 7 PM, Master Planning Meeting in Hall	MAY 1	2 • 7:30 AM, Men’s Group Breakfast at the “Happy Hen” Santa Rosa Ave. • 5 PM, Great Vespers
3 – Paralytic • 9 AM, Confessions • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal • 12:30 PM, Glendi Meeting	4	5	6 - Mid-Pentecost • 11 AM, Catechism Revisited • 6 PM, <i>Blessing of Water</i>	7 • 6 PM, Vespers for St. John the Theologian	8	9 <i>[Fr. Lawrence at St Nicholas, Saratoga for Parish Feast]</i> • 5 PM, Great Vespers
10 – Samaritan Woman • 9 AM, Confessions • 9:30 AM, <i>Akathist</i> • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal	11	12	13 • 11 AM, Catechism Revisited • 5 PM, <i>Food Bank</i> • 6 PM, Vespers	14 • Noon, Senior Lunch Fellowship	15	16 • 10 AM–3 PM, <i>Parish Council Retreat (off-site)</i> • 5 PM, Great Vespers
17 – Blind Man • 9 AM, Confessions • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal	18	19 • 6 PM, Matins for Leave-taking of Pascha	20 • 6:15 PM, Vigil for Ascension Day	21 - Ascension of Christ • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy	22 <i>[Fr. L. in Tempe, AZ. for a meeting, back Saturday evening]</i>	23 • 5 PM, Great Vespers
24 – Fathers of the 1st Council • 9 AM, Baptism: Miriam Brodeur • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal • 3 PM, Skopp/Tolbert Wedding	25 - Memorial Day • 11:30 PM, Panikhida for Memorial Day	26	27 • 6 PM, Vespers	28	29	30 - Soul Saturday • 9 AM, Memorial Liturgy • Afternoon decoration for Pentecost • 5 PM, VIGIL
31 – Holy Pentecost • 9 AM, Confessions • 10 AM, Liturgy/Vespers • Noon, Pot-luck Agape	June 1 - Holy Spirit Day • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy	2	3 - No Fasting <i>[Fr. Lawrence in SF at Diocesan Council Meeting all day]</i>	4	5 - No Fasting • 6 PM, Music and Poetry Evening	6 • 4:30 PM, Panikhida for Sakovich family • 5 PM, Great Vespers