



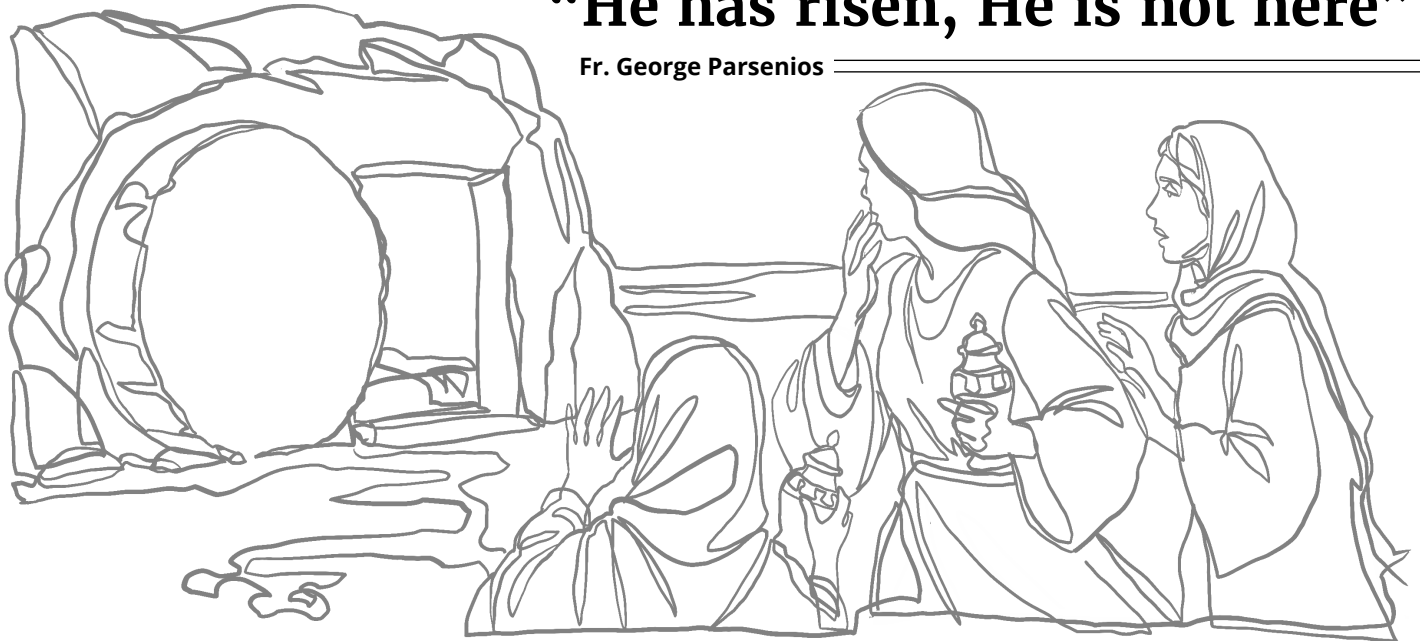
DIAKONIA

A National Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

REFLECTIONS FROM TODAY'S READING - *Mark 15:43-47; 16:1-8*

“He has risen, He is not here”

Fr. George Parsenios



The crucifixion and burial of Jesus were humiliating events, and today's Gospel reading emphasizes two features of this humiliation. For ancient Jews, the two most important features of a burial were (1) burial with one's ancestors and (2) a parade of public mourners. Jesus received neither. Burial with one's ancestors was especially important. When people died in the Old Testament, their burial was described with the phrase, “He slept and was gathered to his fathers” (Genesis 25:8). This phrase literally means that the bones of the deceased were placed in a family tomb filled with the bones of one's ancestors. People who betrayed the ancient Israelites were often threatened with the possibility that they would not be given such a burial (1 Kings 13:21; Jer 22:18). Likewise, public mourning of the dead was an essential way to heal the wound of loss. We see parades of mourning when the Widow of Nain buries her son (Luke 7:12) or when the

sisters of Lazarus mourn their brother (John 11). Such public mourning demonstrated a person's importance. The greater the parade of mourners, the greater a person's fame. Jesus is not mourned at all. The women disciples in today's Gospel find his tomb and go to anoint his body. But there is no parade of mourners. Jesus, therefore, is cut off from all the normal rituals of burial. And this is wholly as it should be. The bones of Jesus were not mingled with the dead bones of his earthly ancestors, because his body would not be remaining in the tomb. And his death was not the cause for weeks of public mourning, because his body would not be remaining in the tomb. His executioners meant to see him buried in shame, but they paradoxically affirmed that his tomb was not the end.

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FROM THE ORIGINAL GREEK:

Symbolon tis Pisteos (Σύμβολον τῆς Πίστεως)

What is the “Symbol of the Faith?”

Fr. George Parsenios



The Creed is a summary of our faith. Our liturgy books, however, do not call the Creed a “summary” of the faith, but the “Symbol of the Faith,” which in Greek is *To Symbolon tis Pisteos*. In antiquity, the term *symbolon* referred to various kinds of tokens that people used to identify one another. When entering into a contract, a piece of pottery would be broken and each person would keep half the broken item as a *symbolon* of their contract. The word *symbollo* means “join together,” and

the members of the contract were identified when the two broken pieces were joined together. Likewise, in the great citizen Assembly of ancient Athens, people were given a *symbolon* to prove that they sat in the Assembly as citizens. A figure named Rufinus had this in mind in the 4th century when he explained why the label *symbolon* was applied to the Creed. Reciting the Creed, he explained, prevented false teachers from infiltrating Churches. The Creed was a *symbolon* of Orthodoxy. Before sharing in communion at each Liturgy, therefore, we recite the Creed in order to demonstrate our true faith in the one true God. It is a *symbolon* of our identity.

THIS WEEK’S LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY

The Greek Orthodox Church Heroically Resists The Nazi Occupation



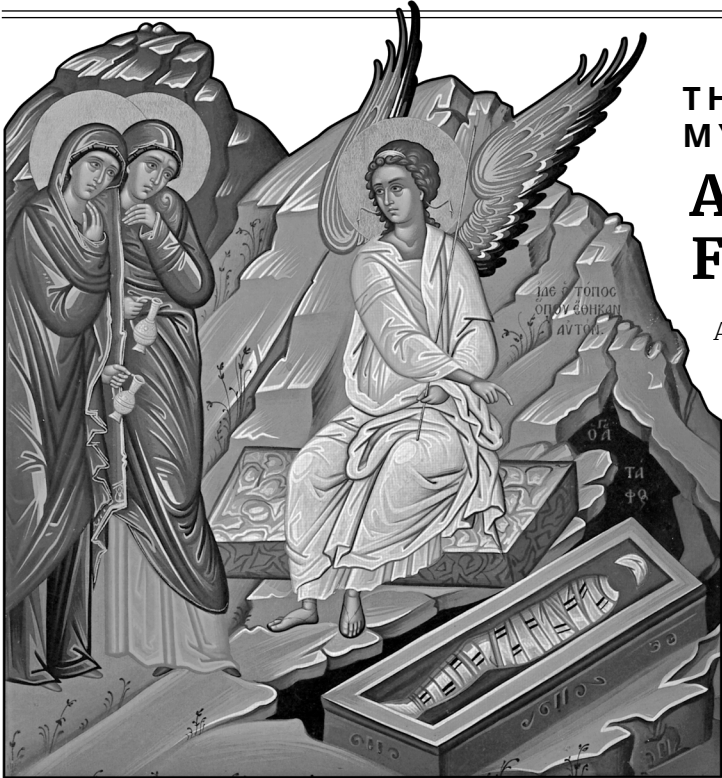
In April 1941, Nazi Germany invaded Greece in Operation Marita. By April 23, Greek forces were forced to surrender. On April 27 German troops marched into Athens. During the occupation (1941–1944), the Greek Orthodox Church was an important force of resistance. Led by Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens,

Church leaders openly opposed Nazi rule, especially the persecution of Greek Jews.

Archbishop Damaskinos took bold and dangerous actions. In 1943, he sent a public letter protesting the mistreatment and deportation of Jews. He ordered monasteries, convents, and priests to hide Jewish families. Working with Athens Police Chief Angelos Evert, the Church helped create thousands of fake identification cards and baptismal certificates. These documents gave Jews Christian names allowing them to pass through Nazi checkpoints.

Over 27,000 false IDs were produced, and over 250 Jewish children were hidden by Orthodox clergy alone. When Nazi General Jürgen Stroop threatened Damaskinos with execution, the Archbishop bravely replied that Greek religious leaders were hanged, not shot. His courage saved thousands of lives.

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THE SUNDAY OF THE MYRRH-BEARING WOMEN

An Example of Faith Over Fear

Around the beginning of His thirty-second year, Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, preaching, healing the sick, and performing miracles. During this time, several women who had been helped by Him chose to leave their homes and follow Him. They showed their devotion by caring for Jesus and His disciples, providing for their needs using their own money and belongings. These faithful women remained with Him throughout His ministry, even staying close during His crucifixion and burial.

After Jesus died, they did not lose faith or allow fear of the Jewish authorities to stop them. Instead, they

prepared special scented oils called myrrh to anoint His body, which was the custom at the time. Early in the morning after the Sabbath, they went to His tomb to perform this act of love and respect. Because they carried myrrh to the grave, these women are known as the Myrrh-bearers.

Some of their names are recorded in the Gospels. They are believed to have been, Mary Magdalene; Mary, the mother of Jesus; Mary, the wife of Clopas; Salome; Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus; and a woman named Susanna. Scripture suggests there were even more women, though their names are not known.

The Church also honors two men who secretly followed Jesus: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a respected Jewish leader and Pharisee who was well educated in the Law of Moses. Early in Jesus' ministry, Nicodemus visited Him at night and came to believe in Him. After the crucifixion, he brought a large amount of myrrh and spices to honor Jesus' body.

Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy and influential man and a member of the Jewish council. Showing great courage, he went to the Roman governor Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Together, Joseph and Nicodemus buried Jesus. Because there was little time, Joseph placed Jesus in his own tomb, which had been carved out of rock.



FAITH IN ACTION

Remain Faithful and Courageous During Difficult Times

The Myrrh-bearers did not abandon Christ during His suffering and death. Joseph and Nicodemus also risked their reputation and safety to honor Him publicly. Follow their example by standing firm in your Orthodox Christian Faith, even when it is unpopular, misunderstood, or personally costly—at school, work, or in social settings.

Ask yourself: *Do I hide my faith out of fear, or do I live it with humility and courage?*



The Gospel According to Saint Mark 16:1-6

And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?” And looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back; for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him.

Just For Kids!
(...and the young at heart)

