**In Fear and Trembling, Take Courage**

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Mark 15:43-47; 16:1-8

 Today, we recall Joseph of Arimathea and the Myrrh bearing women and their courage in those first hours after the Son of God had suffered and died in the flesh on the Cross. Jesus, loving, innocent, humble and holy, has been viciously put to death by the Jewish religious leaders, an angry mob and an oppressive and violent government. For those who love Jesus, the fear is overwhelming. I could imagine my knees buckling, my stomach turning, and my hands and my voice shaking and trembling. The fear of the moment is almost disorienting.

 In our own moments of crisis, we can hide in the upper room like the disciples, frozen in fear, waiting for the trouble to pass. Or, we can take courage and responsibility and do the things that need to be done. Joseph of Arimathea has everything to lose. He’s rich and powerful, he’s a respected member of the religious government at the time. It would be easier for him to stay silent and distance himself from the crucified Christ. He knows that if he stays quiet and distant from Christ, he may keep his position and wealth and respectability.

But Joseph is noble, not only in his rank in society but in the quality of his soul. And in the crucifixion of an innocent man, a grave injustice has been done. Joseph seeks the Kingdom of God first and he desires to do what is right. Despite the overwhelming fear that he must’ve felt when his savior died at the hands of his coworkers and his fellow noblemen, Joseph takes courage, takes responsibility and does the right thing. He asks for the body of Jesus. He takes it down from the cross and wraps it in fine linen and lays Jesus’ sacred and spotless body in a new tomb.

 The Myrrh-bearing women are also greatly afraid. And they too take courage and responsibility and do what is right. They risk their lives, and set out in the dark, to anoint Jesus’ body, honor His sacred flesh and give Him a proper burial. They know that if they’re caught, they risk becoming victims of violence and death, too. They are afraid, they are mourning, all seems lost and hopeless. But they take courage and responsibility and do the right thing anyway.

The hymns that we sing today celebrate this holy Sunday of the Myrrh bearing women. We remember their courage in the midst of fear and trembling. We remember that they did the right thing even when it meant risking everything. I especially want to reflect on one of the hymns, “The noble Joseph, taking down your spotless body from the wood and wrapping it in a clean shroud with aromatic spices, laid it in a new tomb.” This hymn is also a quiet prayer, spoken softly by the priest, after we bring the gifts in procession and make the great entrance into the holy place. The gifts of bread and wine, carried in procession, are symbolically sacrificed before the Divine Liturgy begins. In a sense, the priest and deacons, by carrying the bread and wine in procession from the side table, and around the Church, are now symbolically taking the flesh and blood of Christ down from the cross. At the end of the great entrance, we place the body of Christ on the altar, which is a symbol of the new tomb. We cover the offering of bread and wine with a veil, just as Joseph of Arimathea covers Jesus’ sacred body with a shroud of fine linen. Joseph takes courage when he takes Jesus’ body down from the cross. And in some sense, us too, the priest and all of you gathered here in this holy temple do the same. We more or less risk everything by being here and worshipping our Lord, the ultimate innocent victim of the wicked and cruel rulers of this world. Then the priest offers incense, just as the Myrrh-bearing women offer their fragrant spices and burial myrrh. The priest, on behalf of the people offers a thanksgiving of bread and wine on the holy table, just as the priests of the Old Testament offered calves upon the altar of the Temple for the forgiveness of sins and the union of the people of God.

In a few moments, Jesus offers His own Body and Blood, through the words and hands of the priest and the prayers of all the faithful, as a sacrifice to be consumed by the fire of the grace of the all Holy Spirit. And God will offer our spiritual sacrifice back to us as spiritual food and drink, the resurrected flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, the medicine of immortality.

And so, we experience the resurrection of Christ mystically and spiritually. We know Christ is risen from the dead while we live in a world marked by suffering, fear and death. Today, we will consume the resurrected flesh and blood of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. May we wrap it in the fine linen of a virtuous and holy life. May we bury it in the new tomb of our hearts, remembering God at all times. May we remember all of our loved ones living and departed in the depths of the prayer and silence of our hearts. And, like Joseph of Arimathea and like the Myrrh-bearing women, one day we too may find ourselves in a crisis, where fear and trembling take hold of us, where it would be tempting to flee and hide and stay silent while the innocent are victims of violence. May we too take courage in that moment of darkness and do the right thing. And we will, if seek the kingdom of God first, proclaim the truth, and do what is good and just and right just as the noble Joseph. Amen.