

Good Friday: Sermon before the Shroud

By Archbishop Andrei of Novo Diveyevo

“Say ye, His disciples...stole Him away.” So said the high priests to the soldiers when they notified them of what had happened in the tomb. Starting in verse 12 of the 28th chapter of Matthew, it says: “And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor’s ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money and did as they were taught; and this story has been spread [and is being spread] among the Jews to this day” ... to this day ... to this day. And over Jewish life fell darkness, malice, deviousness — darkness.

And Christ? Christ in the meantime, while the soldiers were spreading these lies, Christ appeared to the myrrhbearers. But how, under what circumstances did He appear? The myrrhbearers came, despite their feminine nature, not thinking about what would happen. They knew that a tombstone blocked the entrance to the tomb, and that guards stood guarding the tomb. But they didn’t think about this; they had to fulfill what was required by the law of Moses: perform the anointing at burial. And here, when they had performed this, Christ appeared to them.

And again: Mary Magdalene, from whom the Lord had cast out seven devils. After the terrible suffering of being possessed, how well she knew this state of joyous peace. And when she saw what happened on Golgotha and she herself participated, along with Joseph of Arimathea, in the burial of Christ, and when she came and did not find Christ — try to understand her state of mind — she who had received her life from Christ, she who in the name of Christ was ready to do anything. And here Christ appeared to her!

And again: two disciples, Luke and Cleopas, were walking after Golgotha. They had seen everything, or more exactly, they had heard everything. Imagine what grief filled their hearts! And here, close by approached a wanderer. He began to explain the Word of God and their hearts were trembling, but they didn’t understand Who was with them. And only then, when they had fulfilled the commandment of Christ — love — Christ appeared to them.

And again: the doors were locked for fear of the Jews. Try to understand their state of mind! We immigrants know what persecution means. We know what we went through when in church during the service we heard the police walking around. So here the apostles were gathered together for fear of the Jews. And Christ appeared to them while they were suffering, seeking Him, because they had already heard from the myrrhbearers that Christ had risen. They were trembling, they were waiting, they had no other concern but this: Christ is risen. Where? How? And then He appeared.

And again: the Apostle Paul, while still Saul. He, as a Pharisee, understood that for the position of the Jewish nation, what was going on in Damascus (where groups of Christians were already preaching openly about the risen Christ), all this was very dangerous. The Messiah, as it

seemed to the Jews, could come at any moment or maybe had already come. And this is how it was, because Christ had come. But they did not know that this was Christ; they were waiting for their own messiah, a king. And here the Apostle Paul (Saul) wanted to help preserve this peace which at that time existed between the Jews and Romans, and wanted to crush this group which was preaching its Messiah. Then after His Ascension, Christ appeared to him. He saw Christ. And from Saul, Christ converted him into the great Paul.

And then the Apostle Peter. And further, and further. Look, there were entire ages: the age of martyrdom, when multitudes of martyrs shed their blood in coliseums, on crosses, in prisons, because Christ appeared to them, was with them. Or better to say, because they were with Christ.

But it was necessary to understand correctly what we believe in. And here again appeared an entire age — the age of the Church Fathers, which formulated: “I believe, Lord, and I confess . . . I believe in one God, Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth” (From the Nicene Creed — “The Symbol of Faith”).

And also the mysterious appearance of the Apostle Paul when he whispered in the ear of John Chrysostom. How many similar appearances we know of from the lives of the saints, when Christ was speaking.

And further: saintliness — when everything had become clear, blood had been shed, the teaching of Christian morals and Christian dogmatics had been established, life went on. Then came the time of saintliness.

And there? There, where they believed the lie that He had been stolen — there was darkness. Wars were going on, fierce nations were fighting. Rome against the Greeks, and later against the Germans. These barbarian nations overwhelmed the Roman state, deviousness, horror.

And in the midst of this fear, there was a quiet joy. The Christian spiritual strivers who were giving peace to the heart.

And here again comes a new age. For a moment, it would seem to be the triumph of Christianity. Yes, there was a triumph. Multi-ton bells were ringing; everything was washed in sunlight, golden. There were church services. And amid this? Amid this the Inquisition took place and some other circumstances which disturbed the real, true Christianity. And therefore it seemed that Christ was hiding Himself.

But no. Christ was there all the time: He was also among our Russian people, in our Motherland. If you were to come into a village at dawn when they were ringing for matins, you would see with what trembling the people came, repenting. If you had looked on the roads filled with pilgrims (from Kursk to Kiev); these people were walking with the feeling of repentance: “Lord have mercy!”

And then the horror of communism, sufferings. We do not know how many tears Christ wiped from the eyes of those who were in concentration camps and of those unfortunate wives

and children who were left at home. Christ was comforting; Christ was helping. And Christ brought us here in order to preserve what we should preserve, what has been passed on to us. And what was passed on to us? This is the Tree of Life, the Divine Eucharist. But the Divine Eucharist may be performed only after a certain rite, which is the preparation for the Divine Eucharist.

And so the Lord has sent us this period of life. We are living in this period. Did you not feel Christ when He took from you the stone which covered your heart, the stone of sin? And when our spiritual father said, "Our Lord and God...by His Grace and mercy and love toward mankind, forgives thee, Child, all thy sins/" did we not weep for joy when suddenly our heart received wings.

And when we understand all this and feel that the object of our life is godliness (keeping what is God's in honor), then we will understand also that all the evil, the stormy sea of deviousness, this very deviousness, and the lie which came from the high priests who said to tell people He was stolen; all this is still going on and divides the world in two.

Those who accepted this lie are hustling about. Even now they will find, lose, and seek again Him Who was "stolen." But we, brothers and sisters, who did not accept this lie, we don't have to seek anyone. We know where our Savior is and where our Life is, our Joy and our Hope. We are here in order to go there, but to go there by way of those steps which will bring us to the Divine Eucharist, to His Body and Blood, to the Tree of Life which He renews for us.