

The Open Tomb and the Open Doors

As we rejoice in this Resurrectional Season, enjoying the sunny days and the vivid nature of God's creation, we also notice when we come to Church that some things are different. For instance, the Holy Doors leading into the Sanctuary are open, and we may still see some of the laurel leaves, flowers, *Pascha* Eggs, and smell the sweet scents reminiscent of those spices and ointments brought to anoint the Body of Christ.

The open doors remind us of several teachings from Sacred Scripture that we relived during Holy Week: We are still in the Resurrection Season; the great stone before the Tomb of Christ was rolled away by the Angel of the Lord; Christ's Tomb, teeming with color and sweet scents, is not a place of death, decay, or corruptibility but rather life, renewal, and transformation; all disappointments, barriers, and limits have been obliterated; and the transfiguring, Life-giving Light of the Eternal Dawn, Whom the myrrh-bearers went to meet early in the morn, has inaugurated a new man, a new age, and a new creation. This is why "Bright Week" is also called "Renewal Week."

Orthodox Christian Tradition, captured in ritual, reminds us of these messages of hope, inspiration, and joy that emanate, ironically and mysteriously, from the Tomb. Instead of darkness, light springs forth; instead of stench, fragrance emanates; instead of shadows, colors radiate; and instead of seemingly insurmountable barriers, shackles, and restraints, we experience unfettered freedom, exuberant joy, and inexhaustible opportunities. Although a Tomb, there is no death, no corruption, and no decay. The Tomb has been transformed into a Womb granting a New Birth, and this time, a birth, not for a period of time with a harsh, final end, but a birth for Everlasting Life. This Tomb becomes a womb for a birth from above, a new creation born again in Christ for eternity.

Truly indeed, in the Resurrected God-Man, our Christ, all things are possible and all things are new, for in Him, all has been accomplished. For in the Old Testament, He rested with the Father and the Holy Spirit on the Sabbath, having created all things; so also in the New Testament, having accomplished His Work for salvation with the Father and Holy Spirit, He rested on the Sabbath to rise on the Eighth Day, the Eternal Day, to grant us a New Creation, delivered and redeemed from the Fall on His Day of Resurrection. In Him, the circle is closed, complete, and total. In Him, eternity and perfection reign, for He is our Resurrection, our Light, and our Life. Not fettered by His nature, as the Sun of Righteousness, He is a bright Morning Star, an Eternal Dawn, that cannot be eclipsed in this New Creation.

Thus, these open doors beckon us to come and meet our Resurrected Lord and Saviour every Sunday, the Lord's Day, the Eternal Day, the Day of Resurrection. He overcame death, burial, the closed gates and chains of Hades, the sealed Tomb, and the closed doors of the upper room to meet Thomas and His Disciples, and through them, you and me. As His Light cannot be overcome by darkness, His Love for His creation knows no bounds. It is infinite, ecstatic, and uncontainable. From this Tomb, He grants redemption and eternal salvation. From this Tomb, He summons us to commune with Him, be One with Him, and through Him, One with one another. Lastly, from this Tomb, He summons us to the banquet of Fellowship with the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit, that only He can grant as the Eternal Logos Who became the God-Man for you and me.

Again, in the Old Testament, this was prefigured by the Hospitality of Abraham and Sarah to the Three Angels at the Oak of Mamre, which had Eucharistic connotations, captured by Orthodox Iconography in the depiction of the Lamb on the table of Hospitality which the three Angels surround and embrace, as they seemingly beckon the beholder to enter and share at the table of fellowship. This has been made possible in the New Age by the New Passover Lamb, Christ, Who has come and fulfilled all things in Him. In His established Eucharist, Christ has made it possible for us to enter into the Hospitality and Mystery of the Trinity. This redemptive message of Scripture is proclaimed from the Pulpit (the Ambo), which in itself has its own message in symbol.

The pulpit was usually carved of white stone or marble. It used to be in the center of the *solea* to emphasize the importance, indispensability, and centrality of the Word of God in worship as in life. Its shape at the base or foundation was round like a circle, as if it could be rolled if pushed over. It was in front of, but most importantly, away from the Holy Doors of the Altar. Thus, it symbolized the great stone that the Angel rolled away from the empty Tomb of Christ from Which is trumpeted the universal, eternal, and transforming message of the Resurrection. (One angel rolled away the stone from the Tomb; two angels sat at each end of where Christ laid, and three angels beckon us to the Table of Hospitality and the Fellowship of the Lamb.)

Rather than an impediment, this Stone (pediment) becomes a platform whence the Angel proclaims to the myrrh-bearing women to go forth and announce to the Disciples Christ's Three Day Resurrection from the dead on the Eighth Day. Many of the pulpits, therefore, had eight columns symbolizing the Eighth Day and Eternity. In many instances, the pulpit had a spiral staircase on each side for ascent and descent, resembling a double helix, and a new code for a new creation. (Remember always, that God's message is eternal and speaks across time and space to generations not yet born.)

In conclusion, (and not in closing, since the doors must still remain open,) we are so blessed to have such a rich and expressive Faith that teaches us in a vibrant, colorful, memorable, motivational, and inspirational to live it and share it for a transfigured life in Christ. As an example of how ancient our teachings are, I will leave you with a quote on Church symbolism attributed to Saint Germanos, Patriarch of Constantinople (715-730 A.D.)

The ambo denotes, by its form, the stone of the holy Grave which the Angel rolled back from the door and sat upon... announcing the Resurrection of the Lord to the women who brought unguents... --*Hist. Mystagogica*

Yours in our Risen Lord,

†*Father James*