



**PASTORAL LETTER OF BISHOP BRYAN BAYDA, CSsR**  
**To the Clergy, Religious and Faithful of the Eparchy of Toronto and Eastern Canada**  
**On the Sunday of the Myrrh-Bearing Women**

**OUR VOCATION TO BE MISSIONARY DISCIPLES AND EVANGELIZERS IN OUR EPARCHY**

**Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ!**

On the Feast of the Myrrh-Bearing Women, I would like to take this opportunity to reflect together with you on what it means to receive the Good News of the Resurrection, the salvific Word of God, and to share it with others.

**Become who we were created to be in Christ**

Where we live and with whom we associate, colours who we are. For example, the family to which we belong says a lot about our identity and biological fingerprint, so to speak. The same applies to our spiritual family, the Church, which defines our “spiritual DNA” within the church community and in the world that surrounds us. I invite you to join me in reflecting on this spiritual DNA as Christians - in our families as a domestic church, in our parishes or religious communities, in our Eparchy and in the Church as a whole. The role of the Myrrh-Bearing Women in the Gospel account of the resurrection speaks to this spiritual genetic code, that is, to our vocation and identity as missionary disciples. All of us are called to become who we were created to be in Christ.

Patriarch Sviatoslav, in his 2011 Pastoral letter regarding *Vibrant Parishes* addresses this call to missionary discipleship:

*This commission of Christ to proclaim the Good News was given not only to the first disciples, the apostles, but is directed to the Church in all times, even to the end of the ages. The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, in fulfilling this commission of our Divine Saviour and speaking through the Bishops of its Holy Synod, defined ‘Holiness of a united people of God’ as the goal of her ministry.<sup>1</sup>*

Pope Francis, in his 2014 Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel - Evangelii Gaudium*, states the following:

*I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation... . The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, .... In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers.”<sup>2</sup>*

Pope Francis continues:

*In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19)... Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries’, but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’... Let us look at those first disciples, who immediately, went forth to proclaim Him joyfully. What are we waiting for? <sup>3</sup>*

**Overcoming Fear**

The Myrrh-Bearing women in spite of their fears went to the tomb to tend to Jesus’ lifeless body and anoint it with aromatic spices. In the shorter ending of the Gospel of Mark we read that the women were afraid when they encountered the angel at the tomb and said nothing to anyone. The longer ending of the Gospel says, “*And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus Himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.*” (Mark 16: 8). Fear will always be a reality in our lives, but if we open our hearts the Holy Spirit helps us overcome our fears and moves us to proclaiming the Good News to others. Let us take courage from the Myrrh-Bearing women and learn from present-day examples of women who show us what it means to be missionary disciples.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Vibrant Parish—A Place to Encounter the Living Christ*, Pastoral Letter of His Beatitude Sviatoslav, December 2, 2011

<sup>2</sup> Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2014), 27 & 28

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2014), 120



In our Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church a multitude of women serve Christ, indeed serve all of us in numerous roles at home in the domestic church. These roles of nurturing spiritual identity, mental and physical caregiving of children and elderly alike are evident at home. They are also evident in our parishes where women minister *as* the Body of Christ *to* the Body of Christ, sharing their gifts for ministry regarding administration, health, catechesis and education, as well as facilitating prayer and worship. Indeed, their presence is felt throughout our community. They fulfill their vocation as lay single women or in religious life, as wives and mothers, multitasking and juggling chaste, compassionate and professional lives in the service of their families, communities and the kingdom of God. They proclaim the Good News with their very lives as missionary disciples. St. John Paul II expounds on this when he speaks of the *Dignity of Women* in his Apostolic Exhortation *Mulieris Dignitatem*.<sup>4</sup>

### Forgiveness

Often the work of women in the Church goes unnoticed and unrecognized. I wonder what the Apostles said to the Myrrh-Bearing women after they, too, saw the empty tomb and verified their Good News? I am guessing they were embarrassed and apologized. When we consider the roles that women have played in the Church throughout history, how many times have their contributions been neglected or perhaps unwelcomed and even, in some cases, suppressed? What can be said about those who have been abused? All of us must reflect on how, as missionary disciples, we are called to support and acknowledge women when they are powerful instruments of the Good News, rather than disregard and diminish their voice, message and ministry. Thus, I apologize for the times I have not celebrated their gifts to the Church as the Body of Christ. I invite all who read this to do the same.

Christ's respect for women was nothing short of radical for His time. We must discard our poorly-formed habits and hear the message in our hearts: "Do not be afraid". Let the Holy Spirit's gift of courage move us forward in healing the insensitivities of the past. Let the Holy Spirit's gift of joy, evident in so many women in the Church, lead us to true conversion. Let our hearts be open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit being brought forth through the women of faith and service in our midst.

### Going Forward

As we move forward, may we be filled with authentic joy—the joy that only the Holy Spirit can bestow upon us. In the months ahead, let us engage in creative dialogue, listening to the Holy Spirit by listening to one another and by developing a culture of discussion, education, conversion and a joyful faith. Let us embrace the challenges of Missionary Discipleship, taking advantage of new technologies available to us. God has a plan for us, but we must listen to Him if we are to rebuild our church communities as places to encounter the living Christ and as places where the children of God shine with the light of the Gospel.

The angel spoke to Mary, the Theotokos, at the Annunciation: "Do not be afraid." Overcoming Her fear, Mary shared the Good News of salvation with Her cousin Elizabeth. Let us join the Mother of God saying, "*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked with favor on the lowliness of His servant.*" *Luke 1:46-48(NRSV)* Let us implore Her to intercede for us and accompany us in what lies ahead.

In Acts 1:8 we read, "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses.*" Witnessing to God is not a solitary task. The words from the Prophet Joel reach us today reminding us of God's promise: "*Afterward I will pour out my spirit upon all mankind. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; even upon the servants and the handmaids, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.*" (*Joel 3:1-2*) The Good News of salvation is Christ, who shared His "divine DNA" with the human race. We see it at work in the Theotokos, in the Myrrh-Bearing women and the Apostles. As for us, all of us are called to be Myrrh-Bearers. Don't be afraid! We are the Church, called to proclaim the Good News of the Resurrection of Christ. In the words of Pope Francis, "What are we waiting for?"

*Given on the feast of the Myrrh-Bearing Women in Toronto, May 16, 2021.*

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<sup>4</sup> St. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988) 25, 26 & 27. See also *Theology of the Body*, St. John Paul II, as well as *Introduction to Theology of the Body*, Christopher West.