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The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church Faith and Order
www.ethiopianorthodox.org

TURN NOW

This is the day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Today, as for practically every other day of the year, there are five scriptural readings appointed to be read as part of the qidase. There is one from St. Paul's letters, one from a universal epistle (last 8 books of the Bible), a reading from the Acts of the Apostles, a verse and a half from St. David's songs, and a selection from one of the Gospels. But isn't this the feast of feasts, the most important day of the year? Doesn't it merit special treatment? The answer is, yes, of course, the feast of Christ's Resurrection does require special observance. That is why we have spent the past fifty five days in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Anyone who has not taken the preparation seriously will find that he or she is unable to fully appreciate the celebration of the feast.

On the eight preceding Sundays, there were Bible texts, selected to focus one's attention on specific aspects of life which require attention. As explained earlier, whether one is preparing to be baptized or has already been initiated into the Body of Christ, the objective of these lessons is to prepare each of us to properly celebrate this feast, by turning away from faulty values that cause us to sin. In the final week, the Holy Week, there are many additional texts of last minute instructions. As the celebration begins, we should compare those readings we have already heard, with those appointed for today, and, those to be read for the next fifty days, to fully appreciate how grand this new Passover really is.

To briefly summarize the previous readings, let us observe that, together, they feature all five pillars of mystery, of our Tewahedo Faith. The Triune God so loved His creation, that, even when we the stewards of that world had turned away from Him, the only begotten Son of the Father became one of us, being incarnate of the ever Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. He grew, like each of us from infancy, showing how we ought to develop in God's grace, as we do physically in the strength of mind and body. Jesus Christ, the same Son of man and Son of God, taught us by word, example and miracles that only He is the fulfillment of the whole Law and all of the prophets. We must give up and turn away from whatever prevents us from following Him. We must believe, accept His grace, by being initiated into His new and everlasting covenant. Usually this starts with baptism of water and anointing with the Holy Spirit. Realizing that the kingdom of God is at hand, we must return, eat His flesh and drink His blood, believing that He will raise us up on the last day. That is when He will judge us, according to how each of us has responded to His presence in our midst. He showed us that in all things, we must live according to God's will on earth as it is done in heaven. To prove this point, He was obedient to that will, even to death on the Cross. Yet, by the power that is His, from the Father, He arose from the dead on the third day.

Though several Western artists have painted their impression of how it might have looked, we have no record of anyone actually watching Christ arise from the dead. From

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the readings appointed for this First Sunday of the Resurrection, we get a glimpse of the astonishment with which this miracle struck eyewitnesses of its results. When we read the accounts closely, we get the sense that they could hardly believe it, themselves, at first. Yet, by His appearances, afterward, his disciples came to believe it had happened, and through the testimony which they passed on, it has finally come to us.

The Gospel reading appointed for this first Sunday of the Resurrection is according to St. John's account. He identifies Mary Magdalene as the first disciple to discover Christ's empty tomb. Seeing that the large stone covering the entrance had been moved, immediately, she turned and ran to tell the other disciples. When Peter and John arrived, they noticed the grave clothes in the tomb. That was the turning point for them: upon seeing what they saw, they believed and went home, pondering how all of this had been foretold in scripture. Returning to the tomb after them, Mary Magdalene, weeping bitterly, not yet comprehending the meaning of the event, looked, for herself, into the tomb. She saw two angels sitting where Jesus body had lain. They asked her why she was weeping. She answered, "Because they have taken my Lord away . . ." At that moment a voice from behind also asked her why she was crying. Again, she turned, and, though not recognizing whom she saw, supposing him to be a gardener, she repeated her complaint. As soon as He called her by name, "Mary," she recognized that it was Jesus who spoke with her, and she professed her faith in Him as the risen Messiah with, "Rabunni."

Thus, we learn that the road to faith was different for each of the disciples, some believing on Mary Magdalene's report, others finding different evidence which spoke to them. But we should realize that through the Bible we have the benefit of all of their testimonies. Whether we have already been baptized into Christ, or are preparing to be initiated into His Covenant, we must come to the realization that all of this testimony has been laid at our feet, and each of us must decide our turning point, to follow the Lord faithfully proclaiming the wonderful works of His salvation on earth, for those who would follow, glorifying the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We have free will, we may also decide to turn away, at any time. However, in the end, we will have to answer for our timely choices when Christ returns in glory.

Abba Thomas
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