

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✦ **May 12, 2013** ✦

St. Thomas Sunday

The Holy Apostle Thomas

St. Epiphanius of Cyprus (403)

St. Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople (740)

New Martyr John of Wallachia, at Constantinople (1662)

St. Germogen, Patriarch of Moscow (1612 / Glorification today, 1913)



St. Thomas



Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Happy Mother's Day!

Many Years! to all our Moms!

Memory Eternal to all our Departed Mothers...

What change do we observe?

"Neither shall they say, *Lo here! or, Lo there!* For, behold the Kingdom of God is within you."

(Luke 17:20-21)

The wounds which Thou didst suffer for our sake, Thou didst show to Thy disciples, O Christ! They have shown the world the glad tidings of Thy Resurrection!

We poor Christians, although we have very little spiritual experience, understand the truth of these words of Christ. After we come to Holy Confession and Holy Communion, and after we celebrate the night of Holy Pascha, what change do we observe in the outside world? None.

This is particularly evident in our present life amid a hostile, unbelieving environment. During these sacred moments we perceive the change in our soul according to our spiritual level. All this is due primarily to the fact that the Kingdom of God is within us, and does not appear in an outwardly perceptible way. Outer manifestations are only the consequences of its inner presence. A person who communes remains the same as he was previously: he does not become stronger, smarter, nor better looking. But inwardly he is different, and he is well aware of this. In exactly the same way the world did not change outwardly from the moment of the coming of the Son of God, but inwardly it became different.

This is particularly evident for our generation, because we are present at the de-christianization of the world, at the systematic and all-encompassing attempt to uproot Christ's work from out of humanity. The outline of a world without Christ already is clearly marked out before us. That is why, in contrast to many previous Christian generations, we now have the opportunity to graphically compare a world with Christ (although relatively) to a world without Christ.

We are able to make this comparison with even greater clarity than all preceding Christian generations because in the world without Christ that was known to them, that is, before His coming, Christ was perceived to have been mystically present. It was understood by previous generations that before Christ's coming all good belonged to Him, and all good served His work. In essence, there was much good in the pre-Christian and non-Christian pagan world, that is, all things had as their object

the preparation of the world for the coming work of Christ. What we see now is an attempt to uproot all of the works of Christ from the world of man, leaving no trace so that they cannot be regenerated. Consequently, that "new world without Christ," the outline of which appears so tangibly before us, is truly completely without Christ. Therefore, we can compare in a clear way the world without Christ to the world with Christ which in part we know through our own experience and in part through the witness of history. We clearly see that the obvious difference between these two worlds is not manifested outwardly. What occurs today and what might occur tomorrow all flow historically out of what occurred yesterday. The difference is in their inner reality, a difference not in quantity but in quality. In the same way a person becomes different by committing some sin which burns his soul, although in outward appearance no change is noticeable.

In this comparison does it not become clear and more understandable what one of the main purposes of Christ's coming was, and from what it saved the human race? The falsity the brutality and inner senselessness which are the characteristic traits of modern times and which take hold of humanity more and more, to the extent in which it withdraws from Christ and which torture mankind so much—all of these terrible characteristics were deeply rooted in the human race two thousand years ago. Two thousand years ago the most holy Nativity of Christ delivered us from the dominion of these characteristics, from the possibility of their total triumph. At the end of time, that end which is not known to any creature, the Second Coming of Christ will deliver long-suffering humanity from this even greater, impudent triumph of evil forces and from their torturous power.

In the meantime, Christ is Risen! And we live by life in Him, in our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN ALEXIOS' MESSAGE ON MOTHER'S DAY

My dearly beloved in the Lord,

"Her children shall rise up and call her blessed..." Proverbs 31:28

On this Sunday, we have the opportunity to celebrate a special day dedicated to our mothers. There are many reasons we should honor them --- for the sacrificial, unselfish love they have given us, all the loving things they have done for us throughout our lives, all the prayers they have prayed for us, and all the sleepless nights they have spent worrying about us!

In thinking about this happy day, what comes to my mind is the awesome responsibilities of motherhood, as well as the joys. The influence of a mother upon the lives of her children cannot be measured. All our character is developed and nurtured by our mothers.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ loved and respected and was obedient to his earthly mother throughout his youth and adolescence. Even at the end, hanging on the Cross in agony and near death, our Lord was concerned for His mother, giving her into the care of St. John.

From beginning to end, **the Most-Holy Theotokos** lived out her calling as the mother of our Lord. She answered "yes" to God's plan for her, and gave birth to our Lord. She was among the Disciples who joined him as he made his way to Jerusalem for His Passion; she was there at the foot of the Cross; she was there among the Disciples when He appeared to them after His Resurrection, and she was regarded by them as the Mother of the Church. What a wonderful example she is for mothers, and indeed for all of us, showing us the way to respond to the call of God with humility and grace, and to remain focused on the Divine calling, whatever it may be.

Raising a child, especially in today's anti-Christian society, is challenging in so many different ways, but mothers must never lose heart or become discouraged. The Mother of God understands very well what it is like to be the mother of a child, the struggles and temptations, and she will most assuredly assist you and intercede for you.

+ALEXIOS, Metropolitan of Atlanta

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!
A Paschal Epistle – *Worth Hearing Again*

PASCHA 1992

**TO THE HIERARCHS, REVEREND CLERGY AND
FAITHFUL OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA**

Dearlly Beloved,

"Come receive light from the unfading Light; and glorify Christ, Who has risen from the dead".

Singing these simple words in the darkness of Pascha night we affirm once again that "the light shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). As we stand in the darkness holding candles, we affirm that all the darkness of the universe is incapable of extinguishing the light of faith in Christ's triumph over death, since "if God is for us, who can be against us" (Rom 8:31)? In celebrating Christ's Resurrection we proclaim our own hope of the Resurrection, "for Christ has risen, the first fruits of them that sleep" (1 Cor 15:20).

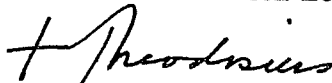
But are we being naive? Do we really accept the Resurrection of Christ? Do we go along with pious Paschal customs while believing the Resurrection to be untrue, or at best, merely a symbolic way to speak about inner spiritual realities? Did the apostles "dream up" the Resurrection? Were they merely deluded? These are important questions, "for if Christ has not been raised your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:17). So we must look carefully at the apostles' experience.

Where the Resurrection was concerned, the apostles began as convinced unbelievers. When they abandoned Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane they had no expectation of His return. They were a frightened, disheveled band of disillusioned and disappointed men. And therefore, when the women disciples reported their experiences at the empty tomb, "these words seemed to them an idle tale" (Lk 24:11). Thomas was the most famous doubter, but he was not alone. And when Mary Magdalene reported that she had seen Jesus alive, "they would not believe it" (Mk 16:11). So when Jesus finally appeared to the apostles He first "upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw Him after He had risen" (Mk 16:14). Indeed, it was only after receiving the Holy Spirit on Pentecost that the disciples were fully capable of being witnesses to the Resurrection.

Dear brother and sisters, let us open the eyes of our hearts and minds to Christ, knowing that however weak our faith is, however sinful and confused and chaotic life around us or within us becomes, we too, like the apostles, have been given the possibility of knowing that our Redeemer lives. And through His life giving Resurrection, He grants us life eternal.

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

With love in the Risen Lord,



+THEODOSIUS
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada



From the Paschal Sermon of St. Basil of Seleucia

Christ descended into hell to liberate its captives. In one instant he destroyed all record of our ancient debt incurred under the law, in order to lead us to heaven where there is not death but only eternal life and righteousness. By the baptism which you, the newly enlightened, have just received, you now share in these blessings. Your initiation into the life of grace is the pledge of your resurrection. Your baptism is the promise of the life of heaven. By your immersion you imitated the burial of the Lord, but when you came out of the water you were conscious only of the reality of the resurrection... The grace of the Spirit works in a mysterious way in the font, and the outward appearance must not obscure the wonder of it. Although water serves as the instrument, it is grace which gives rebirth. Grace transforms all who are placed in the font as the seed is transformed in the womb. It refashions all who go down into the water as metal is recast in a furnace. It reveals to them the mysteries of immortality; it seals them with the pledge of resurrection. These wonderful mysteries are symbolized for you, the newly enlightened, even in the garments you wear. See how you are clothed in the outward signs of these blessings. The radiant brightness of your robe stands for incorruptibility. The white band encircling your head like a diadem proclaims your liberty. In your hand you hold the sign of your victory over the devil. Christ is showing you that you have risen from the dead. He does this now in a symbolic way, but soon he will reveal the full reality if we keep the garment of faith undefiled and do not let sin extinguish the lamp of grace. If we preserve the crown of the Spirit, the Lord will call from heaven in a voice of tremendous majesty, yet full of tenderness: Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you since the beginning of the world. To him be glory and power forever, through endless ages. Amen.

Pascha vs. Easter, Eggs, Bunnies & Baskets

by Phyllis Meshel Onest, M.Div.

Last year, on the day after western Christians celebrated the Resurrection of Christ [Easter], I made my annual pilgrimage to the card, gift and candy store for the 50% off sale of Easter goodies. I also looked for an appropriate card in Russian to send to our adult godchildren in California (Vladimir and Olga came to the U.S. to study, met, fell in love, and wanted to marry as Russians "used to do" in the Church. Jim and I became their sponsors.)

To my surprise the foreign language "Easter" cards all used a form of the word, *Pascha*! Cards in Russian, Slovak, Spanish, Hungarian, Polish! Later I read that "Easter" is used only in English and German. And here I thought that only Ortho-

dox Christians had the "inside track" on the correct term for this holy day!

Pascha is a Greek form of the Hebrew word, *Pesch*- "Passover" in English. We know that Passover is the Jewish commemorating the Israelites freedom and exodus from Egypt. After all, who doesn't have the image of Charleston Heston as Moses engraved in their mind? When I close my eyes I can see him standing on the rocky ledge of the Red Sea, arms spread open in the form of a cross, and the sea parting. Thus the Israelites passed over from "death and slavery" in Egypt to "life and freedom" in the Promised Land.

For Orthodox Christians - and apparently for non-English and German Christians - *Pascha* best identifies our passover, from sin's "death and slavery" to "life and freedom" through Christ's Resurrection. Christ not only fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, but became the "Passover" Himself. What Moses, the prefigure of Christ in the Old Testament, inaugurated for the people of Israel on the temporal level, Christ inaugurated for all people on the eternal level.

So where do the term "Easter" and the Easter Bunny come into play? We have spoken before of the pagan heritage or influence on holidays such as Halloween and Mayday. Well, it occurs here as well. According to the Venerable Bede (673-735 AD), a monk who wrote about Anglo-Saxon mythology, Pascha Sunday was called "Easter" in connection with the Angl-Saxons goddess Eostre/Ostara.

Eostre, the goddess of spring, is venerated at the vernal equinox. It's no surprise that she and her accompanying symbolism were incorporated into the new religion's festival, since Christianity corresponded so well to the already familiar springtime themes of rebirth, new life, new hope, and light. Her existence is based on folklore and the traditional German festival Ostarun. Although Eostre was nearly always accompanied in legend and art with a hare, it was a magical hare ("the Cadbury bunny") who could actually lay eggs. It's easy to see the connection between this myth and the story of the Easter Bunny. [I always wondered why the Easter Bunny, a mammal, brought eggs! Since rabbits reproduce so rapidly, and are associated with fertility, the three became connected - rabbits, eggs and a goddess of Spring (a time of new life and fertility)].

Eggs, though, have a worldwide association with rebirth, new life and fertility. The custom of egg-rolling came from Britain and gave rise to today's egg hunts. Most famous are the red eggs of Pascha which remind us of the blood of the risen Lord. In many Orthodox churches the red eggs are blessed by the priest and distributed at the Resurrection service. Before eating the eggs, people tap their eggs against one another's as they say "Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!" Cracking the egg represents breaking the seal of Christ's tomb. According to custom, the person who cracks the other's egg first will have the blessing.

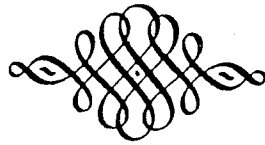
"And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own tomb, which he had hewn in the rock" (Mt. 27:59-60, Gospel lesson for Holy and Great Friday).

"Where is Jesus' tomb?" is an oft-asked question which has echoed throughout the centuries since the Crucifixion. The actual location of Jesus' tomb has never been a serious issue with Orthodox and Roman Catholics. They have always believed that Jesus was buried in the area where the Church of the Holy Sepulcher now stands. But, Christians of the "non-Catholic" traditions have often advocated other sites. One of the main reasons is that unlike Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Coptics, and Armenians, they have no chapels within the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in which to celebrate their resurrection services.

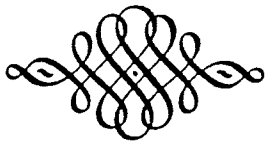
Until the end of the nineteenth century few Protestants visited Palestine, and the problem of the location of Jesus's tomb was academic from their point of view; however, with the influx of tourists (pilgrims) the location became a matter of general controversy. The controversy reached a peak in 1883 when General Charles (Chinese) G. Gordon visited Jerusalem. Gordon refused to believe that Jesus had been buried under a church full of souvenir hustlers and quarreling priests. Gordon selected the Garden Tomb site and after visiting the site, he wrote to London claiming that the site was Golgotha and made some diagrams to support his claim. His military fame and the mystique associated with his subsequent death at Khartoum pushed his speculation to the forefront. There is considerable disagreement, however, about what Gordon said in connection with the Garden Tomb and he may never have actually advocated it as Christ's real burial place.

History of the Garden Tomb

In 1867, a Palestinian peasant accidentally discovered the tomb now known as the Garden Tomb outside the walls of Jerusalem. Conrad Schick, a German correspondent for the Palestine Exploration Fund, reported the discovery in 1874. Even though the cave had a cross in-



The Church Of The Holy Sepulcher



scribed on the wall, Schick did not pay much attention to the tomb since it was like so many other early Christian tombs he had seen in Palestine. In fact, when the contents of the tomb were removed, they were of such little interest that Schick never mentioned them. No serious archaeology was performed on the site until 1975.

A few years after Schick's investigation during the building of the French Monastery of St. Etienne (Stephen) and again in 1937, several ancient burial tombs were uncovered in proximity to the Garden Tomb. All these tombs were outside the ancient city walls of Jerusalem and the newly discovered tombs have now been dated from the 6th to the 9th century B.C. (I Temple period). They were used for multiple burials for many years but were abandoned about the time of the Babylonian captivity (6th century B.C.). There is no evidence that they were used during Jesus' time but were used for burials by Byzantines (5th to 8th century A.D.). The sarcophagi are definitely Byzantine. All archaeological work has shown that these tombs are of the same age (I Temple period). There are no II Temple tombs (400 B.C.-70 A.D.) in the area around the Garden Tomb. A number of misinterpreted archaeological artifacts discovered near these tombs have often

been used to substantiate the claim that the Garden Tomb was Jesus' burial place: for instance, inscribed on one of the Byzantine tombs is the following: "The tomb of the Deacon Nonus Onesimus of the Holy Anastasis of Christ and of this monastery." An additional phrase "buried near his Lord" is supposed to have been found. Much of the Garden Tomb's credibility is based upon this additional phrase; however, neither the original inscription nor an archaeological copy of the inscription has ever been located. It is believed by scholars to be a falsification.

Nevertheless, in 1894 the Garden Tomb Association purchased for 2000 British pounds the ground on which the tomb resides, and created a garden by leveling the area leading to the tomb. Since that time, Protestants and a few others have advocated the Garden Tomb as Jesus' burial place, partly because the Garden Tomb site provides a place for celebrating their resurrection services. At first the Anglican Church supported the speculation but has since withdrawn its official sanction. Serious scholars have always come to the conclusion that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is the most probable site for Christ's Crucifixion and burial. The Garden Tomb claims cannot be substantiated.

Furthermore, scripture clearly states that Jesus was laid in a new tomb (Jn. 19:41), whereas all of these I Temple tombs were used for multiple burials prior to the 1st century A.D.

Historic Evidence for the Tradition Site

The scripture clearly states that Jesus was buried in a tomb near to the site of the Crucifixion, which took place outside of the old Jerusalem city walls. Josephus tells us that during the Jewish Wars (69-71 A.D.) the Romans stormed three walls during the siege of Jerusalem. The third wall stood near where the current wall stands and is north of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher; the wall was started by Herod Agrippa (41-44 A.D.) and hastily completed a short time prior to the siege of Jerusalem (69-71 A.D.) It was not extant at the time of the Crucifixion. The second wall was just south of the Church

of the Holy Sepulcher and Josephus tells us that the Romans forced their way into the city near the Gate of the Garden. Archaeologists have placed the gate about 250 meters west of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

In 135 A.D., Bar Hochba led another Jewish revolution against Rome; the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and leveled the area north of the old city wall. Jews were forbidden to live in Jerusalem and the city became a Pagan city; however, a small group of gentile Christians continued to live within the city with a Bishop Mark as the church leader. During the middle of the second century, Bishop Melito of Sardis visited the city and mentioned in his letter the site of the Nativity and the site of the Upper Room, but not that of Golgotha, probably because it was under a Roman temple and inaccessible to Christians. The forum of the gentile city stood where the traditional Golgotha stood, with a temple dedicated to Venus on the site where the Church of the Holy Sepulcher now stands. Part of the temple foundation is still evident in the passageway leading to Jesus' tomb. During this time, many false sites were identified as the tombs of David, of Solomon, and of Adam, which in fact were also inaccessible. Yet no alternate site was selected as Christ's tomb, probably because the gentile Christians knew exactly where it was located even though they could not visit the spot.

By the time St. Helena arrived in Jerusalem two centuries later, Christian hawkers had invaded the area around Golgotha. Gordon's nineteenth century statement about souvenir hustlers and quarreling priests could have easily been made by the great fourth century Saint. Today, the Garden Tomb exemplifies the same commercial contrast that existed during St. Helena and Charles Gordon's time.

Eusebius describes some of the work performed by Constantine's architects in building the first basilica over the site: they had to tear up paving blocks and remove rubble to restore the area to its original appearance. When St. Cyril visited Jerusalem in the middle of the fourth century, he found the basilica in the center of the city and questioned its location just as later skeptics have done. This

lends strong support to the claim of this site (the site of the present day Church of the Holy Sepulcher) to be the locale of Christ's tomb. The site, which lay outside the city walls at the time of the Lord's burial, later came within the walls as the city expanded. But if the site had been chosen as the result of a fraudulent attempt to select the "site" of Christ's burial, those perpetrating this would have chosen a spot still outside the walls to avoid the suspicion that would naturally attach to the actual site, which by then lay within the walls. For it is known that Christ's tomb was, at the time of the burial, outside the walls (Heb. 13:12, Jn. 19:20,41).

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Furthermore, in an era when every relic of Christ and the Apostles was venerated (4-7th centuries), it is doubtful if any contender to Christ's tomb would not have arisen for commercial, if not for spiritual, purposes. This would be especially true if one realizes that the oppressed heretics (Nestorians, Arians, etc.) were not only denied use of the Anastasia (Church of the Resurrection, the Holy Sepulcher) for their liturgies but were further denied entrance into the church unless they took an oath of Orthodoxy.

In 614, the Persians burned the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, but shortly thereafter the Patriarch Modestos rebuilt it. In 1009 the Caliph Hakin demolished what remained of the tomb and the surrounding rock. His more enlightened successors allowed the Byzantine emperor Constantine Monomacheo to rebuild the church; unfortunately, the cave had to be reconstructed in masonry because none of the surrounding rock remained. The church was again in ruins when the Crusaders entered the city in 1099. They

spent half a century (1099-1149) building the current edifice which enclosed everything in one building, including the small oratories which originally stood outside of the Anastasis. Only St. Helena's Chapel was allowed an external entrance.

From non-Christian sources, it is known that the High Priest John Hyrcanus (d. 104 B.C.) was buried in the vicinity of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Recent excavation under the church has uncovered numerous tombs which have been dated to the first century (II Temple period). These tombs (Jesus' time) show that II Temple tombs existed in the area of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher but are absent in the area around the Garden

Tomb. Although archaeologists can now prove that the Garden Tomb and other contenders are not Jesus' tomb, they cannot prove that the traditional site is definitely Jesus' tomb. The environment has been so disturbed that the traditional site has no resemblance to the Golgotha of Jesus' day. Archaeologists can only verify the dates of the remodeling of the church.

In the end, when scientific investigations fail to present an answer to a religious problem, one must have faith; only in faith that we can stand before the open tomb and proclaim, "Christ is Risen."

--Dr. Larry Sherman

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G. Barkay and A. Kloner, "Jerusalem Tombs from the Days of the First Temple/ The Garden Tomb-Was Jesus Buried Here?" *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 12 (March/April, 1986), pp. 22-57.

THE ARTOS

In the Orthodox Church it is the custom for a single loaf of blessed bread, the *Artos* to be set before the Iconostasis from Pascha throughout Bright Week in memory of the Risen Christ. It is then shared with the whole congregation. Depicted on the top of the Artos is either the symbol of Christ's victory over death, the Cross, surmounted by a crown of thorns, or; the Resurrection of Christ. On the first day of Pascha, during the Liturgy, special prayers are read before the Ambo, and the Artos is blessed and sanctified with the sprinkling with Holy Water. The Artos is kept the whole of Bright Week as a reminder of the presence of the Risen Savior in the midst of those who believe in Him. Throughout Bright Week at the end of the Liturgy the Artos is carried around the church in solemn procession.

On Saturday of Bright Week, in prayer it is broken and distributed as a blessing of Christ the Archpastor to the congregation. In recent times, this is usually done during the St. Thomas Sunday Liturgy. The significance of the Artos is it serves to remind all Christians of the events connected with the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. While still on earth the Lord called Himself the Bread of Life, when He said, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and He who believes in Me shall never thirst (John 6:35). After His Resurrection He more than once appeared to His disciples, ate with them and blessed their food. On the evening after His Resurrection, He was recognized in Emmaus by two of His disciples as He blessed and broke bread with them (Luke 24:13-35).

The Artos is also compared to the unleavened bread of the Old Testament of which ancient Israel, who carried bread with them when they were delivered out of their captivity in the land of Egypt, ate during the week of Passover (Ex. 12:15-20). **St. Cyril of Turov** in 12th Century Russia, said in a sermon on the Sunday of Pascha:

"Even as the Jews bore the unleavened bread upon their heads out of Egypt through the desert, (Ex 12:34) until they had crossed the Red Sea, they dedicated the bread to God, divided it amongst them all, and all having eaten thereof, became...terrible to their enemies, even so do we, saved by our Resurrected Lord from the captivity of the Pharaoh of the mind and of the Devil, bear forth bread - the Artos - from the day of the Resurrection of Christ, and, finally, having dedicated this bread to God, we eat of it and preserve it to the health of our body and soul."

On the 40th day after His Resurrection the Lord ascended into heaven. When they met for common prayer, always remembering His Holy Supper, they would partake of the Body and Blood of Christ. Even when they sat down for an ordinary meal they would leave a place at the head of the table empty, laying a piece of bread at that place, for the invisible presence of our Lord, raising it above their heads with the words, "Christ is Risen" with the rest answering, "Truly He is Risen."

Remembering this custom of the Apostles', the Fathers of the early Church made it their custom to put the Artos out at the Paschal Feast in memory of the appearances of the Risen Lord to His disciples, and also; the fact that the Lord Who suffered and was resurrected for our salvation has made Himself the true Bread of Life and is invisibly present in His Church always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).

(Blessings and gratitude to Mary Boyer, who bakes our excellent Artos and faithfully and expertly prepares the prosphora bread for Holy Communion, throughout the year.)

INVISIBLE MOM

I'm invisible... It all began to make sense, the blank stares, the lack of response, the way one of the kids will walk into the room while I'm on the phone and ask to be taken to the store. Inside I'm thinking, "Can't you see I'm on the phone?" Obviously not. No one can see if I'm on the phone, or cooking, or sweeping the floor, or even standing on my head in the corner, because no one can see me at all. I'm invisible.

Some days I am only a pair of hands, nothing more: Can you fix this? Can you tie this? Can you open this? Some days I'm not a pair of hands; I'm not even a human being. I'm a clock to ask, "What time is it?" I'm a satellite guide to answer, "What number is the Disney Channel?" I'm a car to order, "Pick me up right around 5:30, please."

I was certain that these were the hands that once held books and the eyes that studied history and the mind that graduated summa cum laude -- but now they had disappeared into the peanut butter, never to be seen again. She's going ... she's going ... she's gone!

One night, a group of us were having dinner, celebrating the return of a friend from England. Janice had just gotten back from a fabulous trip, and she was going on and on about the hotel she stayed in.

I was sitting there, looking around at the others all put together so well. It was hard not to compare and feel sorry for myself as I looked down at my out-of-style dress; it was the only thing I could find that was clean. My unwashed hair was pulled up in a banana clip and I was afraid I could actually smell peanut butter in it. I was feeling pretty pathetic, when Janice turned to me with a beautifully wrapped package, and said, "I brought you this." It was a book on the great cathedrals of Europe.

I wasn't exactly sure why she'd given it to me until I read her inscription: "To Charlotte, with admiration for the greatness of what you are building when no one sees." In the days ahead I would read -- no, devour -- the book. And I would discover what would become for me, four life-changing truths, after which I could pattern my work: No one can say who built the great cathedrals - we have no record of their names. These builders gave their whole lives for a work they would never see finished. They made great sacrifices and expected no credit. The passion of their building was fueled by their faith that the eyes of God saw everything.

A legendary story in the book told of a rich man who came to visit the cathedral while it was being built, and he saw a workman carving a tiny bird on the inside of a beam. He was puzzled and asked the man, "Why are you spending so much time carving that bird into a beam that will be covered by the roof? No one will ever see it." And the workman replied, "Because God sees." I closed the book, feeling the missing piece fall into place.

It was almost as if I heard God whispering to me, "I see you, Charlotte. I see the sacrifices you make every day, even when no one around you does. No act of kindness you've done, no sequin you've sewn on, no cupcake you've baked, is too small for me to notice and smile over. You are building a great cathedral, but you can't see right now what it will become." At times, my invisibility feels like an affliction. But it is not a disease that is erasing my life. It is the cure for the disease of my own self-centeredness. It is the antidote to my strong, stubborn pride. I keep the right perspective when I see myself as a great builder. As one of the people who show up at a job that they will never see finished, to work on something that their name will never be on. The writer of the book went so far as to say that no cathedrals could ever be built in our lifetime because there are so few people willing to sacrifice to that degree.

When I really think about it, I don't want my son to tell the friend he's bringing home from college for Thanksgiving, "My mom gets up at 4 in the morning and bakes homemade pies, and then she hand-bastes a turkey for three hours and presses all the linens for the table."

That would mean I'd built a shrine or a monument to myself. I just want him to want to come home. And then, if there is anything more to say to his friend, to add, "You're gonna love it there."

As mothers, we are building great cathedrals. We cannot be seen if we're doing it right. And one day, it is very possible that the world will marvel, not only at what we have built, but at the beauty that has been added to the world by the sacrifices of invisible women. ~ **Happy Mother's Day!** ~