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The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Faith and Order

The First Sunday of Zemene Fasika (Paschal Season)

Liturgical Readings:

1 Cor. 15:1 – 20; 1 Pet. 1: 1- 13; Acts 2: 22 - 27,

Psalm 118:24;

John 20:1-19

The Anaphora of Saint Dioscorus

Resurrection

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.

Beloved brethren, let us stand in spirit at the tomb.

Hear again the voice of the Lord before the grave of Lazarus: *“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.”* He did not say, “I will show you resurrection.” He did not say, “I will teach you about life.” He said, “I AM.” The Resurrection is not merely an event—it is a Person. And that Person is our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us walk, in the dim light before dawn, to the garden of Joseph of Arimathea. The Sabbath has passed. The silence of grief still hangs over Jerusalem. The One who healed the sick, opened blind eyes, cleansed lepers, and raised Lazarus has Himself been laid in a borrowed tomb. His sacred Body—bruised, scourged, pierced—rests behind a sealed stone. Roman soldiers stand guard. The earth that quaked at His death now waits in solemn stillness.

And yet, before the sun dares to rise, love rises first.

Mary Magdalene comes, while it is yet dark, as recorded in John 20. With her are the other faithful women—Mary the mother of James, Salome, and those holy daughters of Jerusalem—according to Matthew 28, Mark 16, and Luke 24. They carry spices in trembling hands. Their hearts are heavy, yet their devotion is steadfast. They whisper among themselves, “Who shall roll us away the stone?”

They do not come expecting resurrection. They come to anoint a corpse.

But behold—the stone is already rolled away.

The guards who boasted in strength lie as dead men. The earth that shook at the crucifixion has yielded its captive. The grave clothes lie folded. Death has been disturbed.

Saint Matthew tells us there was a great earthquake; an angel descended, his countenance like lightning, his raiment white as snow. And he declares with heaven’s authority: *“Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for He is risen.”*

O beloved, mark the words carefully—which was crucified. The risen One is the crucified One. The same Body that was bruised and beaten, crowned with thorns and pierced by nails, now stands glorified beyond corruption. As the Prophet had foretold, He would not see decay. As Saint Peter preached in Acts of the Apostles 2:24–27: *“It was not possible that he should be holden of it.”* It was not possible that death could imprison Life.

Mary Magdalene runs. Her breath is short; her heart pounds. She finds Simon Peter and the beloved disciple. "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre," she cries. Even now she does not comprehend the fullness of glory.

Peter and John run to the tomb. John outruns Peter, yet hesitates at the entrance. Peter, impetuous as ever, enters in. He sees the linen clothes lying, and the napkin folded separately. This is no theft. This is no hurried removal. This is divine order. John enters, and the Scripture says, *"he saw, and believed."*

Beloved, see the transformation. Only days before, Peter denied Him thrice. The disciples hid behind locked doors for fear. But an empty tomb has begun to kindle an unquenchable flame.

Why, we may ask, did the Lord choose women to be the first witnesses of His Resurrection?

In the wisdom of God, the daughters of Eve—through whom sorrow entered—become the heralds of joy. In a world that dismissed their testimony, heaven entrusted them with the greatest proclamation in history. They who stood near the Cross when others fled are granted the first vision of the risen Christ. Love remained faithful, and love was rewarded.

Mary Magdalene lingers, weeping in the garden. She sees two angels. She turns—and supposes Him to be the gardener. O sacred irony! The Second Adam stands in the garden of the new creation. And when He speaks her name—"Mary"—the darkness of sorrow shatters. "Rabboni!" she cries. The Shepherd calls His sheep by name, and she knows His voice.

She is sent as apostle to the Apostles: "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father." Thus the Resurrection restores not only life—but relationship. Not only breath—but sonship.

Beloved, this is the day of which Psalms 118:24 proclaims: *"This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."*

Remember how He said in John 2:19, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* They mocked Him. They misunderstood Him. But on the third day, the Temple of His Body stood again. And as He declared in John 10:17–18, *"I lay down my life, that I might take it again... I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."*

Lazarus was raised by Christ's command—but Christ rose by His own divine authority. He needed no angel to summon Him. He is the Resurrection itself.

At His crucifixion, the earth quaked, the veil was torn, and graves were opened. Even before Easter dawned, the tyranny of death began to crumble. As Saint Paul proclaims in First Epistle to the Corinthians 15:20, *"Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept."* He is the firstfruits—not the last. For as First Epistle to the Thessalonians 4:14 assures us, *"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."*

The soldiers spread falsehood: "His disciples stole the body." But falsehood trembles before folded grave clothes. Fearful fishermen did not overpower Rome. No—He has risen indeed.

And what does this mean for us, within the ancient and holy faith of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church?

It means death is no longer a prison but a passage. It means the bruised Body that hung upon the Tree is now the glorified Body seated at the right hand of the Father. It means the Eucharist we receive is communion not with memory—but with the Living Lord. It means that when we descend into the waters of baptism, we are buried with Him; and when we rise, we rise into His life.

"I am the resurrection, and the life."

Not was. Not will be. Am.

Therefore, though we were dead in trespasses, we shall live. Though our bodies return to dust, they shall be raised incorruptible. Though tears endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning.

Beloved, let the garden of the tomb become the garden of your heart. Let the stone of unbelief be rolled away. Let the voice that called "Mary" call you by name.

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.

To Him be glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.