02/05/2024

MESSAGE OF H.H.B. THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III FOR THE FEAST OF PASCHA 2024



THEOPHILOS III

By the Mercy of God, Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and all Palestine,

to all the Church members, grace, mercy, and peace from the All-Holy and Life-giving Tome of the Risen Christ.

“This is a day of festival: at the Awakening of Christ,

death has fled away and the light of life has dawned;

Adam has risen and dances for joy.

Therefore, let us cry aloud and sing a song of victory”

(Sunday of the Adoration of the Cross, Troparion 1, Ode 1)

Today, the Church of Christ proclaims the gospel of unspeakable joy to the world. It proclaims to the ends of the earth the Resurrection of its Founder and our Saviour Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, the Crucified. Jesus Christ the Son and Word of God, made Incarnate of the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin, born in the flesh and seen on earth. To him who received our human flesh in one hypostasis, the Humanity, and in two natures, the Divine and the human, and was acquainted with us human beings. He taught us ways of repentance, living in peace, solidarity and love, even towards our enemies. He healed the infirm and the incurable sick and raised the dead. He loved us humans to the end and willingly submitted Himself to death for us, even the death of a dishonourable cross. He shed His divine blood for the forgiveness of our sins. He offered himself a living sacrifice, redeeming and pleasing to God.

Having been crucified by Pontius Pilate and buried, He also went to those in Hades, to those who had died for ages and were held by the devil. He also included these in His saving redemptive work, “which the Father had given Him to do” (Jn. 17, 4). These “were first received by the divine economy beheaded John the Forerunner, who had prepared them for repentance”. The Lord Jesus Christ, who descended to Hades for three days, also preached to them. Those who believed in Him, He saved from Hades, from the torment of eternal hell. Condescending to them, He resurrected and granted them eternal life saying, “enter again into Paradise”. In the completion of this work, Hades had no power over Him. He couldn’t keep Him. Hades thought that he had found a man, but encountered God. By the power of the Father and by His self-given divine power, Jesus Christ, the Lord, crushed eternal levers, crushed the locks of death and autonomously “raised from the dead and resurrected Adam with an almighty hand”.

The Resurrection of Christ from the dead, that is, His victory against death, does the Church celebrate with joy, singing: “O life-giving Lord, after Thy dread Resurrection, as Thou brakest not the seals of the Tomb, so when the doors had been shut fast, Thou didst likewise enter and while bringing joy of heart to Thine all-famed Apostles didst grant Thine upright Spirit unto them for the sake of Thine immeasurable and great mercy” (Thomas’ Sunday, Matins, Praises, Troparion 1). This Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, initiated, that is, Christ “infused” into His disciples on the first day of the Resurrection, saying, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them “ (John 20, 22). Nevertheless, He transmitted it as well in all His appearances after His resurrection “by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the

things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1,3), "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts 1, 9).

Ascended gloriously into the heavens, Jesus Christ sat down at the right hand of the Father and "deifying the flesh which He assumed", He "did not leave His disciples orphans" (Jn. 14, 18), but sent them instead, from the Father, as it was promised, "another Comforter" (John 14:16), the Spirit of truth. He sent the Holy Spirit "on the day of Pentecost in a sound like a violent breath" and in divided tongues like fire, which sat on each one of them (Acts 2, 1-3). Through the Holy Spirit, He enlightened and strengthened them and they became fervent heralds of the Cross and of His Resurrection. "He made the fishermen wise" and through them "enchanted the world". Through their preaching, they "planted" the Church in all the earth until its end, against which, as promised, "the gates of Hades shall not prevail" (Matthew 16:18).

To this, as the manifestation of His kingdom on earth, He assigned the work of Evangelism, that is, the ministry of evangelism, to the Father's pleasure, because as the apostle of the nations says, "God was in Christ, calling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5, 19) "and because in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2, 9).

This work of reconciliation is performed by His Body, the Church, through the centuries throughout the world. The Church of Jerusalem, the Mother of the Churches, "the first to receive remission of sins through the Resurrection", does this in the places on earth where Christ appeared in the flesh. To them, both near and afar, peace is preached, especially in these difficult times of war raging in the world and destroying not only property and residence but also human life.

From these places, namely from the Holy and Life-giving Tomb, from where the light of life arose and where the Paschal Resurrection Divine Liturgy is celebrated, the Church of Jerusalem appeals for the cessation of all hostilities, primarily to Gaza, the entire Holy Land and the Middle East. It also appeals for the unity of the Orthodox Churches in the bond of peace and for its unifying testimony to the suffering world, anxiously awaiting for this.

None the least, to its flock in all its normal jurisdiction, Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian state, Qatar and the pilgrims all over the world, it addresses the Easter greeting "Christ is risen" and the triumphant speech of the Saviour, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

In the Holy City of Jerusalem, PASCHA 2024

Fervent supplicant for all before God,

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

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