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The First Stasis Of The Salutations to the Most Holy Theotokos at the Jerusalem Patriarchate



On Friday evening of the First Week of Lent, the First Stasis of the Salutations to the Most Holy Theotokos was read at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, as part of the Service of the Small Compline and the Canon of the Akathist.

This contrite service was officiated by H.H.B. the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, who entered the Church of the Holy Sepulchre accompanied by Hagiotaphite Fathers. After the Contakion of the Akathist and the incense offering, according to the Typikon order, His Beatitude read the First Stasis of the Salutations to the Most Holy Theotokos and before the end of the service delivered the following sermon to the congregation;

“When the bodiless one learned the secret command, in haste he came and stood before Joseph’s dwelling, and spake unto the Maiden who knew not wedlock: The

One Who hath bowed the Heavens by His descent is held and contained unchanging wholly in thee. Seeing Him receiving the form of a servant in thy womb, I stand in awe and cry to thee: Rejoice, thou Bride unwedded"; our Holy Church narrates in melody.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims

Behold, "fasting has come, mother of chastity, accuser of sins, advocate of repentance, life of the angels and salvation of men" St. Theodore of the Studion says (Triodion, Monday of first week, Aposticha of Praises).

Indeed, the salvation of us people is inseparable to the bodily and spiritual fasting. And fasting is inseparable to the great mystery of the Divine Providence, namely God the Word and our Saviour Jesus Christ, Who received the form of a servant in the womb of the Ever-Virgin Mary the Mother of God.

For this reason, our Holy Church keeps the Service of the Akathist Hymn to our Most Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary in a festive manner during the Great Lent. The content of the Akathist refers to the unspeakable mystery of the God's condescension and of His Divine reconciliation (Romans 5:10), which means that it refers to the incarnation of Christ, God the Word, through the pure flesh of the Ever-Virgin Mary, as St. Andrew of Crete very clearly states: "We celebrate the union of God with men, the deification of the human nature, the reform of our humankind, our change for the better, our lifting up and our ascension to heaven".

This is the purpose of the prayer and repentance during the fasting of the Great Lent, to "the deification of the form which we have received", for which St. Gregory of Nazianzen writes: "For that which has not been received is incurable; but the one who is united with God, that can be saved".

And we are wondering; what is that "which has been received"? It is no other, my dear ones, than our human nature which has fallen through sin and has been wounded, the human nature which "the Son and Word of God, Christ, has transformed in Himself, namely, has healed, rendering to it [our human nature] the first gift of "being according to the image" which was the first honour that man lost by the carelessness of our ancestors, as St. Andrew of Crete says.

The mystery of the salvation of man is owed to the unspeakable and indescribable contribution of the Most Blessed Theotokos Mary and the gratitude of our Holy Church is addressed to her.

Let as hear therefore, the relative to this event interpretation of St. John Chrysostom, regarding the narrative of St. Luke the Evangelist about Virgin Mary: “And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth…and the virgin’s name was Mary” (Luke 1:26-27), and he had received such orders from God: “Go to Virgin Mary. Go forth to the living city for which the prophet said: “Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God” (Ps. 87:3). Go to my logical paradise, go to the gate which is on the east (Ezekiel 40:6, 22:40), go to the worthy dwelling place of my Word (Ps. 32:14)…., go and greet Mary with the words “Rejoice thou who art full of grace” (Luke 1:28), so that I may have mercy upon Eve who has fallen”. Behold therefore, why the hymn writer of the Church exclaims: “Rejoice thou through whim joy shall shine forth; rejoice, thou through whom the curse shall be blotted out” and “Rejoice heavenly Ladder whereby God came down. Rejoice Bridge leading those of earth to Heaven”.

Our Holy Church my dear brothers and sisters is the Ark of our salvation, namely of the healing and the freedom in Christ. Christ’s Cross and His Passion on the Cross are the heavenly ladder through which God humbled Himself in Jesus Christ, becoming “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). Moreover, Christ’s Cross is the bridge through which we are carried from the death of the passions, of the corruption and sin of this world, to the immortal and eternal life, namely to the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Let us therefore entreat the Theotokos that with her intercessions we may be deemed worthy to complete the period of the Great Lent and conclude to the Glorious Resurrection of Christ, in Whom and through Whom we will also be resurrected. Amen.”

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