27/04/2020

THE FEAST OF THOMAS' SUNDAY AT THE PATRIARCHATE



The Feast of Thomas' Sunday was celebrated by the Patriarchate on Sunday, April 13/26, 2020.

On this Sunday the Church commemorates the event of the first day after the Resurrection, "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders …" (John 20:19-29), when Jesus appeared to His disciples at the Upper room, Thomas was not with them, and when the disciples told him "we have seen the Lord", he was not convinced, but said; ""Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe". Then after eight days Jesus appeared to the disciples again and told Thomas ""Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

According to the typikon order of the Patriarchate, this feast was celebrated at the

Church of the Holy Sepulchre, as a “parresia” with Vespers in the afternoon and the Divine Liturgy at the Holy Sepulchre in the morning, officiated by His Eminence Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, with only a few co-celebrants, due to the safety measures. There was also a celebration in Cana of Galilee with the Divine Liturgy which was held according to the current restrictions by the Hegoumen Archimandrite Chrysostom.

His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos sent the following Sermon for the flock in Cana;

“Come on this auspicious day of the Resurrection let us partake of the new fruit of the vine of divine gladness and of the Kingdom of Christ, praising Him as God unto the ages” (Pentecostarion, Canon of Easter, Ode 8, troparion 2).

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians

Christ our God, who “has endured the cross, voided death and risen from the dead” (Octoechos Sunday Matins praises tone1, troparion 1), has gathered us all in this holy place of Cana of Galilee in order to celebrate the beginning of the marvels Jesus worked, and revealed His glory and His disciples believed in Him (John 2:11). Today’s feast of the wedding in Cana and of the miracle of turning the water into wine on this Thomas’ Sunday of the Renewal week has a special significance. Because, on the one hand, the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of our Christian faith as St. Paul preaches; “But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (1 Cor. 15:13-14). And on the other, Easter is the primary celebration of the Eastern Church, as St. Paul says; “For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5;7).

Jesus chose the day of His friend Simon the Canaanite’s wedding to begin the working of His divine signs, His miracles, at the presence of His Mother, the Ever-Virgin Theotokos Mary. And St. Paul regards marriage as sacred and great; “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:32).

Interpreting these words, St. John Damascene says that St. Paul refers to the union of Christ with the teaching of His Church; “in this manner there is a sacrament of the concealed truth, as the union of the woman with the man depicts the union of Christ with the Church”.

In other words, in the wedding of Cana there was a sacrament which depicted the

hidden truth, namely the spiritual wedding of Christ with the Church, as very clearly St. Paul teaches by saying; “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25).

Moreover, St. Paul’s teaching is confirmed by the witness of St. John the Evangelist in his book of Revelation by saying; “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7).

This prophesy of St. John refers to the joy of the partakers of the triumphant Church, namely of the Kingdom of God, which is represented as the lamb’s wedding. “And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven”, the Lord preaches (Matt. 8:11). And St. Andrew of Caesarea of Cappadocia, interpreting the verse “the guests at the Lamb’s wedding supper” says; “The supper of Christ is the gladness of those who are saved, and the harmonious gleefulness, and blessed are those who partake of it and enter the eternal bridal chamber along with the holy bridegroom of the purified souls”.

During the Last Supper, namely the tradition of the Holy Eucharist, our Lord Jesus Christ “ took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament… But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matt. 26:26-29).

“The fruit of the vine”, namely the wine, which is an inseparable element of the wedding ceremony, here at the Last Supper depicts the foretaste of the sacred blood that was shed from the pierced side of our Lord Jesus Christ. Behold therefore, why Christ blessed the marriage on the one hand, and on the other, He projected the wine with the transformation of the water, by His perfect divine power in Cana of Galilee.

Behold therefore why St. John Damascene says rejoicing; ““Come on this auspicious day of the Resurrection let us partake of the new fruit of the vine of divine gladness and of the Kingdom of Christ, praising Him as God unto the ages” (Pentecostarion, Canon of Easter, Ode 8, troparion 2). In other words, through His blood that was shed from the cross, and through the day of the Resurrection, Christ renews our human nature which He had received, and dresses it with the beauty of

His incorruption, thus making it partaker of His eternal Kingdom, as Prophet David says; “The Lord reigneth, he is clothed with majesty” (Psalm 93:1); He also makes our human nature an accomplice of its [the eternal Kingdom’s] supper, as St. Luke the Evangelist says; “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God” (Luke 14:15).

My dear Brothers and Sisters, it is made clear that the divine grace given through the sacrament of the wedding held by the Church is sanctifying and strengthening, enabling the couple to live their union in Christ, with mutual love and devotion, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25), as well as their mystical partaking in the redeeming and incomprehensible mystery of the inseparable union of the bridegroom-Christ with the bride-Church.

For his good unfaithfulness, the Holy Apostle Thomas was a partaker of this incomprehensible and paschal and divine sacrament of the mystical wedding, as well as of its supper. St. Thomas asked to put his fingers in the print of the nails and thrust his hand into the Resurrected Lord’s side, and by the Lord’s philanthropy he was allowed to investigate the incorrupt deified body of Christ and cried out loud; “My Lord and my God” (John 20:19-31). Therefore, my beloved Brothers and Sisters, we, who have been enlightened by the unwaning Light of the Resurrection of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, cry aloud: “Christ is risen from the dead, by death he hath overcome death and to those in the graves He has bestowed life”. Christ is Risen!”

His Beatitude officiated an All-night Vigil at the H. Monastery of Saints George and Ioannis the Hozevites and delivered the following Sermon;

“This chosen and holy day is the first of the sabbaths, the queen and lady, the feast of feasts, and the festival of festivals, wherein we bless Christ unto the ages” St. John Damascene declares in his hymn (Pentecostarion, Sunday of Pascha, Ode8, troparion 1).

Beloved Fathers in Christ,

The unwaning Light of our Lord Jesus Christ’s Resurrection has gathered us in the holy and historic Hozeva Monastery in order to celebrate the chosen and Holy day, the inauguration of our renewal in Christ. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” St. Paul preaches (2 Cor. 5:17).

“Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter…(John 10:22),

“[the time] of unfaithfulness, and Jesus came, the God and temple, eternal God, recent temple, which could be destroyed in a day, and rebuilt in three days, and remain unto the ages, in order that I may be saved and be recalled from the old body of death, and become a new creation, redeemed [from death] through such a philanthropy” St. Gregory the Theologian says.

The three-day Resurrection of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ is the end of the mystery of the Divine Providence, namely of the incarnation of God the Word through the pure flesh of the Ever-Virgin Theotokos Mary. Behold why during this Paschal feast we bless Christ unto the ages.

On this second Sunday after Easter, we celebrate the inauguration of Christ’s Resurrection and the placing of the hands of St. Thomas the Apostle: “A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:26-28).

Interpreting this witness of St. John, the Evangelist, St. Cyril of Alexandria says: “righteously therefore we hold the gatherings in the Churches on the eighth day [on Sunday]. And in order to explain the meaning of what is held, we close the doors, but Christ comes and can be seen by all of us, visibly and invisibly; invisibly as God, and visibly again in the flesh, and He allows to touch His Holy Body. Let us therefore accept as reasonable the mystical blessing by participation, receiving Christ in our hands, so that we also may have unshakable faith in that He raised His own body as a temple”.

In other words, the communion of the Body and Blood of Christ is the true confession of Christ’s Resurrection from the dead. For this reason, our Holy Father Cyril makes us pay heed by saying; “Let us thus abandon unfaithfulness as something destructive, but on the contrary, having touched Christ, we may find ourselves with steadfast mind”.

Let us, my brethren, renew our souls on the bright day of the Resurrection “our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19). This truth is witnessed by the partakers and communicants of the incorruption, namely of Christ’s Resurrection, the Saints George, Ioannis and Ioannis the New, the Hozevites, and especially entreat the Mother of God, the evident glory and superior of all creation, in order to intercede to Her Son and God for all of us.

Christ is risen from the dead, by death hath He trampled down death, and on those in the graves hath He bestowed life. He is risen indeed!”

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