21/03/2021

The First Stasis of the Akathist at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre

On Friday evening of the first week of Lent, 6/19 March 2021, the Service of the Salutations of our Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary was held at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

This included the Small Compline and then the Canon of the Akathist was chanted by Hierodeacon Simeon on the right and Mr Vasilios Gotsopoulos on the left. His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos recited the first stasis of the Salutations and at the end of the Service addressed the faithful as follows:

“All creatures were sore amazed at thy divine and great glory, Maid, O pure Virgin, who hast not known wedlock; for thou didst hold in thy womb the God of all, and gavest birth to the timeless Son, Who doth grant salvation unto all them that acclaim thy name” (Heirmos of the Akathist, Ode five). (And in simple words; the whole creation remained in ecstasy because of your divine glory. Because, You, Virgin, who did not have the experience of marriage, conceived God in Your womb, Who dominates over all things, and bore the timeless Son, Who gives salvation as a present to all those who praise You). These are the words of the hymnographer of Theotokos, Saint John Damascene.

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians

The God-bearing Church Fathers established that every week of the Great Lent we would exclaim the “Rejoice” of Archangel Gabriel, namely the Salutations to the Theotokos and Mother of God the Word, the Most Blessed and Ever-Virgin Mary.

In Theotokos Mary of Nazareth, we praise, bless and glorify the message of the unspeakable mystery of the divine providence, namely the incarnation of God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ. This mystery of the “reconciliation of men to God” (Romans 5:10), as Saint Andrew of Crete says, is what we celebrate, the union of God with man, the deification of the human nature that He took upon Himself, the ascension into the heavens.”

Behold why the hymnographer through Archangel Gabriel’s mouth exclaims to the Theotokos: “Rejoice, thou through whom joy shall shine forth. Rejoice, thou through whom the curse shall be blotted out. Rejoice, thou the Restoration of fallen Adam. Rejoice, thou the redemption of the tears of Eve”(Beginning of the Salutations). And again why “all creatures were sore amazed at they divine and great glory, Maid, O pure Virgin”.

The Most Holy and Ever-Virgin Mary is the One who through Her obedience to the Will of God, “behold the maid of the Lord, let it be done unto me according to Thy will” (Luke 1:38), liberated the fallen Adam from the curse, through his recall, and Eve from her tears.

In other words, the curse and the consequence of the fall and disobedience of Adam introduced humankind to the death of sin, as Saint Paul says: “as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12). “By his [Adam’s] fall”, Saint Chrysostom says, “even those who did not eat from the wood [of life] became mortals, just like him”.

The Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, by the birth of God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ through Her pure flesh, became the Mother of Life, and Christ is the Life. “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26) the Lord says. Behold therefore why the hymnographer exclaims “O pure Virgin, who hast not known wedlock; for thou didst hold in thy womb the God of all, and gavest birth to the timeless Son, Who doth grant salvation unto all them that

acclaim thy name".

Because the timeless Son and Word of God received our human nature from the Virgin Mary and reshaped it in Himself, Christ grants salvation as a gift to all those who praise in honour the Theotokos, His Mother. "Thy womb bore God for us, fashioned in our shape. O Theotokos, pray to Him as the Creator of all, that we may be justified through thine intercessions" (Triodion, Wednesday of the first week, Great Compline, Ode 6, Theotokion) Saint Andrew of Crete says in his hymn.

Indeed my dear brethren, the whole creation, the logical and illogical nature is sore amazed before the majesty and incomprehensible mystery of the Ever-Virgin Mary. That is why the hymnographer cries out loud: "Rejoice, thou Initiate of the ineffable counsel. Rejoice, thou Faith in that which demandeth silence" (Salutations).

In other words, the Theotokos became a communicant of the "ineffable counsel of God" on the one hand and a prototype of obedience in faith on the other. "Faith is sustained only by obedience. And when God orders [us] to obey, there is no need for explanations" Saint John of Damascene says.

We are also called to this, to the obedience of our Orthodox faith, and to our participation in the Holy Pascha through fasting and repentance. Along with the hymnographer, let us entreat the Most Blessed Theotokos and Mother of God and say: "I have lost the beauty and glory with which I was first created; and now I lie naked and ashamed" (Triodion, Wednesday of the first week, Great Compline, Ode B: 4). O Theotokos the hope and protection of those who sing thy praises, take from me the heavy yoke of sin, and pure Lady, accept me in repentance" (Triodion, Wednesday of the first week, Great Compline, Ode 1, Theotokion). Amen! Have a blessed period of the Great Lent."

The Service was attended by the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras with the Consulate staff and his family.

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