17/05/2021

HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM CELEBRATES THE DIVINE LITURGY IN RAMLE – ANCIENT ARIMATHAEA



On Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women 3/16 May 2021, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos officiated the Divine Liturgy at the Holy Church of Ramle Monastery of the Patriarchate.

On this feast the Church commemorates Joseph of Arimathaea – present-day Ramle – who was a noble counsellor, accepting and longing for the Kingdom of God, who dared to go to Pilate and ask for the Body of our Lord, the Crucified Jesus Christ, and having received It, he buried It with the help of the Myrrh-bearing Women at his new Tomb (John 19:38-42, Matt. 27:57-60).

For the commemoration and honour of Joseph of Arimathaea and the Lord's burial, the Divine Liturgy was officiated by His Beatitude, with the co-celebration of their Eminences the Archbishops: Damascene of Yaffo, Aristarchos of Constantina, Philoumenos of Pella and Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, along with

Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and Deacons. The chanting was delivered by the Ramle Byzantine choir as the Service was attended by the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangleos Vlioras and many faithful Christians with mixed feelings; joy for the end of the pandemic and intense prayer for the ceasefire between Israel and Gaza, and the episodes in the cities of Ramle and Lod.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“Let Joseph, the noble counsellor be praised, together with the Myrrh-bearers and the divine disciples, since he also is a herald of the Arising Christ”, the hymnographer of the Church proclaims (Matins, Ode 9, Troparion 15).

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians,

The grace of the hidden disciples of the Lord, Joseph of Arimathaea, the biblical city of Ramle, and Nicodemus, as well as of the Myrrh-bearing Women, have gathered us all in this holy place, to give glory to our Resurrected God, Jesus Christ, who has delivered us from the corruption of death and its darkness.

The undeniable fact of the Resurrection of the Son and Word of God, Christ, is characterized as the primary volcano, whose scorching lava and light have covered the whole creation, and this light is that of the mystery of the divine providence, namely the incarnation of God the Word and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

“Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:31-32) the Lord says. Interpreting these words of the Lord, Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: “When the beast [the devil] was deposed, then Christ drew towards Himself the seduced nation, not only the Jews, but all the people, for their salvation, calling them to Him through faith; for with the Law, the call was limited, but with Christ it is general for all people”.

Their faith in the Resurrected Christ, of both the hidden disciples and the Myrrh bearers, does the Church honour and venerate today on the third Sunday after Pascha. Moreover, these disciples and the Myrrh bearers became witnesses and preachers of the resurrection of Christ. “And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him [Jesus]. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of

Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you" (Mark 16:1-7) Mark the Evangelist says.

Indeed, my dear brethren, through His luminous resurrection, our Lord Jesus Christ, who said: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12), abolished the kingdom of darkness and ignorance and completely overthrew the tyrannical power of the devil over men, as Saint John Damascene says: "Thou didst descend into the deepest parts of the earth, and didst shatter the everlasting bars that held fast those that were fettered, O Christ. And on the third day, like Jonas from the sea monster, Thou didst arise for the grave" (Pascha Canon, Ode 6 Heirmos). And according to Saint Gregory of Nice, through the resurrection of Christ, the power of the death of sin was abolished, and there was a transmutation of our human nature. "The kingdom of life came and the power of death was abolished, and another birth happened, another life, another kind of life, the transmutation – recast of our nature".

This transmutation or recast of our nature happened through Christ, when He received our human nature through the pure flesh of the Ever-Virgin Theotokos Mary, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and He absolved it [our human nature] from the corruption and from sin.

And now, through His resurrection, Christ highlighted the human nature as victorious over the bodily death, while through His Ascension to God the Father, He deified the human body 'the whole substance" He had assumed, as Saint Simeon the translator says.

Behold, therefore, why Saint Chrysostom triumphantly proclaims: "The Lord's death mortified death". And according to Saint John Damascene: "we celebrate the mortification of death", namely the abolishment of our primary enemy, as Saint Paul says: "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15"26).

Saint Gregory Palamas says that the Lord's resurrection is the renewal of the human nature, it is the reviving and reshaping and restoration to the eternal life of the first Adam, who was devoured by death because of his sin, and through death, [it is] a retrogression towards the earth from which he was created.

As mentioned above, true witnesses of Christ's resurrection were the Myrrh-bearing Women and especially the Theotokos Maria, the Mother of God, who was the first to see the Lord-risen from the dead, as Saint Gregory Palamas says: "The Theotokos

was the first to receive the good news of the Lord's resurrection, as it was befitting and just, and she was the first to see Him resurrected and delighted in His divine words".

Commenting on the presence of the Myrrh bearers at the burial and resurrection of Christ, Saint Theophylaktos of Bulgaria notes characteristically: "the condemned nation was the first to receive the vision of the goodness and while the disciples run away, the women endure and wait". This means that the condemned nation of the women, due to Eve's disobedience in paradise, was the first to enjoy the vision of the Lord. And this was because Christ's disciples ran away to hide in fear, but the women persevered.

This very delight of the vision of Christ's resurrection are we also called to seek, my dear brethren, imitating the hidden disciples, Joseph and Nicodemus and especially the Myrrh-bearing Women. Let us say along with the hymnographer: "Let us arise in the deep dawn and instead of myrrh, offer praise to the Master; and we shall see Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, Who causeth life to dawn for all" (Canon of Pascha, Ode 5).

"Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all" (2 Thess. 3:16).

Christ is risen! Many happy returns!"

At noon, Archimandrite Niphon hosted a meal for the Patriarchal Entourage and the Consul General, and His Beatitude addressed all present as follows:

"Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Our Holy Church is called the Church of the Resurrection, namely of the light of truth and of the hope of God's Kingdom. "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20).

We comprehend these words of Saint Paul within the Church, especially through our participation in the Divine Liturgy, where we become communicants of the Body and Blood of the resurrected God, our Saviour Christ.

We say this because the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is the heart of the body of the Church, and the protection wall for us Christians, who preach the peace and love of Christ.

The Church of Christ, and especially the Rum Orthodox is the lighthouse that illumes the world with the holy light of the All-holy and Life-giving Tomb, namely

the light of Christ’s resurrection.

We celebrate today the three-day burial and resurrection of our Saviour Christ, however, we are not hidden, like His disciples, Joseph and Nicodemus, but like the Myrrh-bearing Women, who dismissed fear, and ran to the Tomb, seeking Christ.

We are called to do this very thing, my dear brethren, and do this not only for ourselves but for all our fellow men, indiscriminately. We are called to always hearken to the Lord’s command: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

Humanity and especially our region are tested by both the coronavirus pandemic and the difficult political situation and the eruption of violence.

Having our hope in the resurrected Christ, “we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4), praying for the ceasefire and the rule of peace, which is so much needed in the world and in the Holy Land. “For He is our peace”, namely Christ, as Saint Paul preaches (Eph. 2:14).

Christ is risen!”

The feast of the Sunday of the Myrrh bearing Women was also celebrated at the Chapel of the Myrrh bearing Women of Saint James Cathedral, with Vespers on Saturday afternoon and and the Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning. The Services were officiated by His Eminence Archbishop Theophanes of Gerassa, with the co-celebration of the ministering Priests of the Cathedral, Fr Farah/ Haralambos Bandour and George Baramki at the chanting of the Cathedral’s choir under the lead of Mr Rimon Kamar. The Services were attended by the members of the ‘Myrrh bearing Women’ s association and the representative of the Greek General Consulate Mrs Christina Zaharioudaki.

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