14/06/2021

SPEECH OF HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS III FOR THE FEAST OF THE ASCENSION ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES AT THE ELEONA MONASTERY



Dear Father Romanos,

Respected Clergy,

Beloved Monastics,

Sisters and Brothers,

On this glorious Feast of the Ascension, which is the seal of the resurrection, we join in the words of the ancient hymn,

O Christ our God,

Upon fulfilling your dispensation for our sake,

You ascended in glory, uniting the earthly with the heavenly,

You were never separate but remained inseparable,

And cried out to those who love you,

“I am with you and no one is against you,”

Here we understand the profound meaning of the Ascension, that, though Our Lord Jesus Christ has gone to the Father to prepare a place for us, even so we are still intimately connected with him. As the hymn says so clearly, we are inseparable.

This unbreakable relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ, which finds its greatest expression in this life in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, is the assurance of our final deification. This is the goal of every Christian, and this goal of complete union with God must be the daily focus of our spiritual lives. And this assurance is also our strength and consolation in times of suffering and difficulty.

Last year on this feast, we were not able to be with you. But this year our joy is full in our ability to be in this holy place on this day. And so, we are reminded forcefully that the Holy Places, which Divine Providence has placed under the guardianship and protection of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, are not just archeological curiosities; on the contrary, they are living witnesses to our sacred history and are places of prayer, worship and most especially the Divine Eucharist.

It is in this action of the Divine Liturgy that the Mother Church of Jerusalem gathers all in the embrace of the true Orthodox ecumenical spirit. We are glad to have with us representatives from Orthodox national Churches, so that we may show to the world our united Orthodox faith and witness. This is a powerful visible sign of our unity, which is a precious gift that must be nurtured and sustained by all.

And yet it is further the case that we have the responsibility to ensure that the Holy Places are open to all people of good will without distinction, for the true Orthodox ecumenical spirit welcomed all, so that all may know the spiritual refreshment to those places that are signs of divine-human encounter. In this way the Patriarchate guarantees the character of Jerusalem and the holy land.

We rejoice therefore on this great feast, and we pray that our crucified, risen, and ascended Lord Jesus Christ may enlighten our hearts and strengthen us for our mission.

Amen.

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