21/04/2022

Perth: Holy Tuesday Bridegroom Service



On Holy Tuesday His Grace Bishop Elpidios of Kyanea Presided at the Bridegroom Service at the Church of Sts Constantine and Helene in Perth. Towards the end of the service, a beautiful and inspiring hymn, composed by the hymnographer Kassiani, was chanted .

Following the reciting of the hymn, His Grace gave a brief explanation regarding Kassiani emphasising that:

“The hymn that we have just heard is composed by Kassiani and who in the text makes reference, not to herself, but to an anonymous sinful women who fulfilled the part of a myrrh-bearer prior to our Lord’s death and burial. Kassiani lived in the 9th century and is believed to of been a participant in the “bride show” (the means by which Byzantine princes or emperors would chose a bride, giving a golden apple to his choice) organized for the young bachelor-emperor Theophilos.

The emperor’s eyes fell on Kassiani so he approached her and making a sarcastic remark, ‘Through a woman came forth all the hardships and evil things.’ Here he was referring to sin and suffering coming into the world as a result of Eve’s transgression in Paradise. Kassiani very wisely responded by saying: ‘And through

a woman came forth the better things,' referring to the Holy Theotokos and how she was the one who gave birth to our Saviour, Jesus Christ. The emperor's pride was immediately wounded and he bypassed Kassiani and gave the golden apple to another potential bride.

Many years passed and Kassiani went on to become a monastic. Theophilos wished to see her one last time before he died, so he decided to visit the monastery where she resided. Kassiani was alone in her cell, writing her now famous hymn, when she realised that the commotion she heard was because Theophilos and his party had arrived. Kassiani fled from her cell not wishing to see him and hid, leaving the unfinished hymn on her writing desk. Theohilos was directed to her cell. Not finding Kassiani, he noticed papers on the desk and read what was written on them. When he was done reading, he sat and added one line to the hymn; then he left – never to see Kassiani again.

The line attributed to Theofilos is 'those feet whose sound Eve heard at dusk in Paradise and hid herself for fear.' These words also relate to Kassiani whom upon hearing the footsteps of Theophilos, immediately hid. When Theophilos departed from the monastery, Saint Kassiani returned to her cell, discovered what Theophilos had written, left it as it was and finished the hymn now popularly known as 'They Hymn of the Sinful Woman.' Kassiani has also composed the Canon chanted on Holy Friday and Holy Saturday (Κύματι Θαλάσσης). She is an official saint of our church celebrated on the 7th of September."

His Grace Bishop Elpidios at the end of the service wished everyone a blessed and salvific Pascha.


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