26/04/2022

Homily of Archbishop Elpidophoros at the Service of the Lamentations – Matins of Holy and Great Saturday



My beloved Christians,

Tonight’s celebration of our holy Epitaphios Service is an invitation to join in the procession of the numberless Christians who have come before us – across all the generations, in the Burial of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the retinue of the Kouvouklion, we all participate in the funeral cortege of our Lord Jesus Christ.

From the Cross the Lord is brought down by the hands of Joseph. His Holy Mother and the other Women Disciples wail and lament as they embrace His dead body, so deeply wounded and scarred for our salvation. They begin to anoint His divine Body for burial with the myrrh and aloes brought by Nikodemus.

But the sun is setting. So, as observant Jews obedient to the Sabbath – not yet understanding that this is the Holy and Great Sabbath – they hasten to carry the Body of the Lord and lay it in a new tomb – ἐν μνήματι καινῷ κηδεύσας ἀπέθετο, just as we chanted at the Apokathelosis this afternoon and a little while ago at the beginning of this service.

We read what happened in the Gospel of John:

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in grave-linens with the aromatic spices, as is customary in Jewish burials. Now there was a garden in the place where Jesus was crucified, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had ever been buried. Therefore, on account of the Jewish Day of Preparation and because the tomb was close by, they buried Jesus there 1

This is our journey tonight! This is the path we are following behind the Sacred Kouvouklion.

To the Garden, where the sin that marred the Garden of Eden will be wiped away.

To the Garden, where the sweat of our Lord that had rained down like the great drops of Blood watered the Garden of Gethsemane.2

To the Garden, where by the sweat of His brow He will feed the entire world with the Bread that becomes His Body, reversing the agony of Adam.3

To the Garden, where the Root of Jesse4 plants a new humanity, which will live eternally with God in His Heavenly Kingdom by His Resurrection.

My beloved Christians,

Our journey tonight is to that Garden, carrying the Body of our Lord, because we are His Body, His Church.

Like the Holy Women, together with Joseph and Nikodemus, we are outside the established order of things; outside the City, outside the camp, outside the conventions of this world.

As it says in the Letter to the Hebrews:

Therefore Jesus, that He might sanctify the people with His own Blood, suffered outside the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him outside the camp, bearing his reproach. For here, we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.5

We walk tonight in this Epitaphios Service as did the faithful Disciples who took the Lord to His Tomb. We walk with love, with emotion and with confidence in His victory over sin and death. We walk as those who understand that our lives are not permanent in this world. They are eternal in the next world, as the Apostle says to the one to come.

Therefore, my dear sisters and brothers in Christ, let us continue on our journey tonight with all those who love the Lord. Let us never be ashamed of our faith in the One Who was Crucified for us. And in that Garden, where the empty, rich man's tomb waited for the Body of the Lord, let us plant the seed of New Life in Christ. For that Garden is inside each one of us, in our hearts and souls – where, like an empty tomb, we await the Body of Christ to fill us with newness of life, that will be everlasting, unto ages of ages. Amen. Καλή Ἀνάσταση!

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