11/05/2022

THE FEAST OF THE MYRRH-BEARING WOMEN SUNDAY AT THE PATRIARCHATE



Sunday 25 April/ 8 May 2022 was celebrated by the Patriarchate as the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women according to the book of Pentecostarion.

On this Sunday the Church commemorates Saint Joseph of Arimathaea – present-day Ramle – who asked Pilate for the Lord's body and buried Him along with the Myrrh-bearing Women.

This event was celebrated in Ramle, at the Holy Monastery of the Patriarchate, with the Divine Liturgy which was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants their Eminences, the Archbishops, Aristarchos of Constantina, Damascene of Yaffo, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and Arab-speaking Priests, with the attendance of a large congregation of the Orthodox faithful of this city.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus. And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre” (Mark 15,43-46) Mark the Evangelist testifies.

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims

Today the Holy Church of Christ honours and venerates the commemoration of the Holy Myrrh-bearing Women and that of the secret disciple, Joseph from Arimathaea, the current city of Ramle. According to the witness of the Evangelists, the Myrrh-bearing Women were true witnesses of the Resurrection, while Joseph and Nicodemus of the burial of our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as of His God-man nature of His.

“The Myrrh-bearing Women were the first people to see the Resurrection and they evangelised it to the disciples” according to the synaxarist. These women were the first witnesses of Christ’s resurrection. “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” (Mark 16,6). Joseph and Nicodemus were distinguished for their bravery and boldness as Mark the Evangelist says: “Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus” (Mark 15,43).

Christ’s resurrection, my dear ones, is the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets, that is the revelation of the purpose of the mystery of the incarnation of God the Word through the pure flesh of the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. In other words, the Myrrh-bearing Women and the Lord’s secret disciples Joseph and Nicodemus were given the grace of witness and speak about the One of whom “we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled” (John 1,1).

This graced of the Holy Spirit was given to the former blasphemer and persecutor and injurious (1 Tim. 1,13) Saint Paul, when he was called unto his Apostolic office. He says: “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make

all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3,8-10).

We, my dear brethren, being members of the body of Christ, that is the Church, which He beautified with His own blood (ref. Acts 20,28), have become communicants of this incomprehensible richness of Christ and the enlightenment of the mystery which was hidden for centuries in God, as well as of the diverse wisdom of God.

Indeed, the Church of Christ is his empty tomb, where "we receive the experience" (ref. Hebrews 11,36) of our resurrection in the communion of the body and blood of Christ during the Divine Liturgy. "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6,54) the Lord says. Our Holy Church of Christ is the place of "the Lord's Pascha", namely the place, or rather the empty tomb from which Christ God transfers us from the death of corruption and sin (= infirmity) to life eternal and from the earth to heaven, as the hymnographer says: "We celebrate the death of death, the destruction of Hades, the beginning of everlasting life. And with leaps of joy we praise the cause thereof, the only blest and most glorious God of our Fathers" (Easter Sunday, Ode 7, Troparion 3).

Saint Paul scorns those who say "that there is no resurrection" (1 Cor. 15,12) saying that if Christ is not risen then the faith of us Christians is in vain. "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. 15,14).

Pointing out the power of faith the Holy Apostles and Evangelists advice thus; Saint Paul says, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving" (Col. 2,6-7). Judas, the brother of James the brother of God writes in his letter: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Judas 3). Saint John the Theologian preaches: "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5,4). No one can face our faith, which through works has gained the trophies for us, Saint Cyril of Alexandria says.

""We celebrate the death of death, the destruction of Hades, the beginning of everlasting life," the hymnographer says, paying heed to Saint Paul's preaching:

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15,20). In other words, being perfect God and perfect man, Christ became the firstfruits of those who slept, because He was the first of men to tumble down death, just as our ancestor Adam entered the death of sin and became the firstfruits of the fallen, leading us to corruption, Saint Cyril of Alexandria says.

And according to Saint Gregory Palamas, “the Lord’s resurrection is the renewal of the human nature, it is the reviving and renewal and restoration of the first Adam to the eternal life, because he was devoured by death because of sin and through death he regressed to the earth by which he was created”.

Just like Eve was the first one to see Adam, likewise the first one to see the resurrected Christ was also a woman, Saint Gregory Palamas says. “First of all others was a woman that saw Him; the Theotokos received first the gospel of the resurrection, as it was befitting and righteous, and she saw Him resurrected before anyone else, and enjoyed His divine voice”.

Through His Resurrection our Lord and God Jesus Christ inaugurated the entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven, therefore, we, my dear brethren, let us entreat the Most Blessed Theotokos, the Myrrh-bearing Women and Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus, who buried the Lord, that by their intercessions we may be deemed worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen. Christ is risen! Many happy and peaceful returns!”

The feast was organised by the energetic Hegoumen Archimandrite Niphon, who addressed the Patriarch and hosted a meal along with the Community Council. At the meal His Beatitude addressed those present as follows:

“Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious” (Psalm 66,1-2), that Christ is risen!

Reverend Holy Fathers and Brethren,

Respected President and honourable members of the Community Council,

Your Grace Archimandrite Niphon,

The grace of Christ's secret disciple Joseph has led our footsteps to his hometown, the biblical Arimathaea, the current Ramle, to celebrate along with our Rum Orthodox flock living here the Lord's Pascha, namely the three-day burial and the luminous Resurrection of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This event of our blessed Paschal gathering of both the clergy and the people shows the hypostatic power of the truth of our Christian faith, according to the true testimony of the Evangelist John who says, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1,14).

This glory of "the only begotten of the Father" Who is immortal is preached and confessed boldly by the Holy Church of Christ and especially by the Mother of all Churches, namely the Church of Jerusalem, which is founded on this very place of Golgotha, the sanctified by the divine blood on the Cross, but also by the new and empty tomb, from which the true shone forth, the Light of the Resurrected Christ.

This unwaning light of the glory of the Resurrected Christ, namely the truth, peace, righteousness and love of His, as well as His infinite philanthropy, is served throughout the centuries in the Holy Land by the visible and invisible presence of the Church of Jerusalem, the Venerable Rum Orthodox Patriarchate, which always follows the Lord's commands, "Fear not" (Matt. 10,31), "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16,33). "And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5,4-5).

We say this because in our days the power of evil and lawlessness is active as Saint Paul preaches: "the mystery of iniquity doth already work" (2 Thess. 2,7). However, we, my dear brethren, are fortified by the divine light and the hope of the resurrection and neither worry nor flinch, because as Saint Paul says, "God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2,13-14). Christ is risen! Many happy, blessed and peaceful returns!"

This feast was also celebrated at the chapel of the Myrrh-bearing Women within Saint James Cathedral, with the Divine Liturgy which was officiated by His Eminence Archbishop Theophanes of Gerassa. Co-celebrants to His Eminence were the ministering Priests of the Cathedral, Fr Farah Bandour and George Baramki. The chanting was delivered by Monk Joseph of Mount Athos and Fadi Abdelnour in

Greek on the right, and by the Cathedral’s choir under Mr Rimon Kamar in Arabic on the left. The service was attended by the parish members of this Cathedral.

At the end of the Divine Liturgy, the Myrrh-bearing Women’s association of the Cathedral’s community hosted a reception at the Ouzud restaurant.



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