

Imbros: The Service of the Bridegroom at the Church of the Annunciation of the Theotokos, Agridia



In the afternoon of Palm Sunday, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew officiated at the Service of the Bridegroom at the Holy Church of the Annunciation of the Theotokos in the mountainous village of Agridia.

Joining His All-Holiness in prayer were His Eminence Metropolitan Kyrillos of Moschonisia, His Eminence Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Myra, His Eminence Metropolitan Kyrillos of Imbros and Tenedos, His Grace Bishop Iakovos of Stovia with clergy from the Holy Archdiocese of Ohrid, and believers from Agridia.

“We heard tonight from the Synaxarion of the day that “on holy and great Monday, they commemorated the blessed Joseph the handsome, and the fig tree cursed and dried up by the Lord”, mentioned, among other things by His All-Holiness in his homily. And he continued:

“But why did the Church determine that we should remember on this day the “handsome” Joseph and the event of the “withering of the unfruitful fig tree” by the Lord? For Joseph, the beloved son of Jacob, because of the sufferings he suffered at the hands of his brothers and the patience and fortitude with which he faced them, is a type and prefiguration of our Lord, while the “withered fig tree” symbolises those people who do not bear fruit in faith and virtues.

With these two examples, our holy Church introduces us to the atmosphere of Holy Week, calling us on the one hand to imitate Joseph in virtue and in his absolute trust in God and, on the other hand, let us not be like the fruitless fig tree, but let our life give richly the immeasurable of virtues, be fruitful in good and divine works.

The story of Joseph the handsome could be considered as an introduction to the divine drama, since it reveals to us that human life has a cruciform dimension, and that, therefore, companionship with Christ means being crucified with Him, as we heard in the emblematic troparion of the day: "Let us also go with him and be crucified with him and die for him to the pleasures of this life."

The Lord calls all of us, His disciples throughout the ages, that is, every Christian, to walk with Him towards the voluntary Passion and the Cross. But being crucified with our Lord means crucifying the old man in us and killing our passions. The great apostle of the nations, Paul, writes that we become "partakers of the image of this death" and that "our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin." (Rom. 6,5-6). Companionship with our Lord, being crucified with Him and the mortification of the carnal mind and renunciation of "one's own will" are the conditions for the abolition of sin, they are the conditions "that we may live together with Him". One does not live the life "in Christ" without experiencing the Cross, without participating in the Passion of Christ. This, however, requires and presupposes humility.

Christ walks towards the extreme humility of the Passion and the Cross and calls us, as His humble fellow travellers, to walk the same path, to find ourselves with Him on the same path of humiliation, because "from this humility, the death of one's own wills is born; and from the mortification of the wills, the roots of the pleasures wither, and from these all the defects of the soul are expelled", writes Saint Athanasios the Great. Accompanying Christ means that I love Christ so that I willingly accept to become a partaker of His life, His glory, but also of His Cross and His Passion.

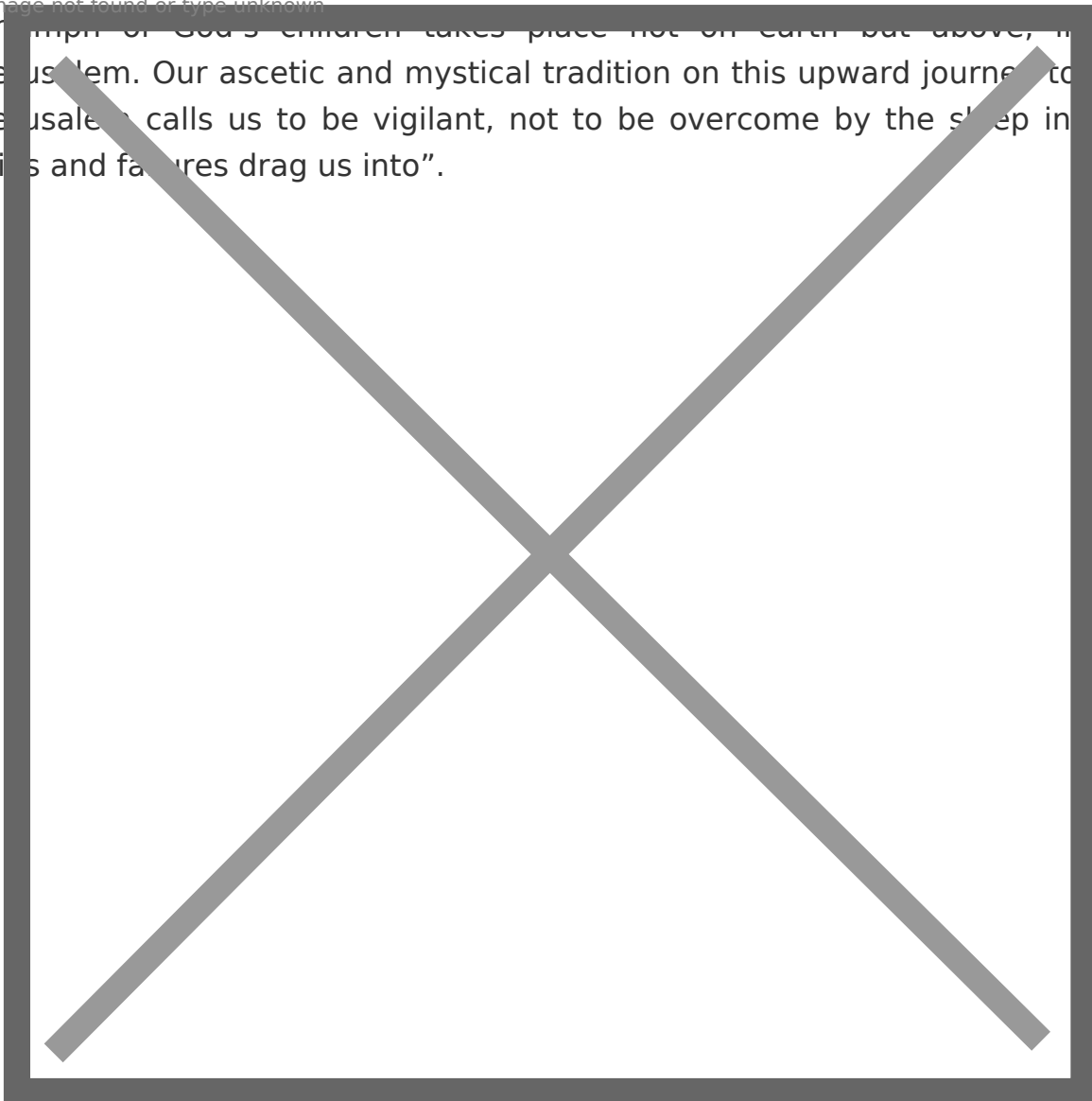
Thus, the entire Great and Holy Week is shown before every believer as a journey, an uphill journey, an upward and difficult journey, because it is "the ascent towards perfection". This proves that our Christ wants by His side living, true collaborators in the work of salvation. He does not want us to passively await divine intervention, but to become participants in God's salvific plan, living vessels of His unrelenting love and His companions on the way of the voluntary sacrifice on the cross, that is, to become people of love in its cruciform dimension: the vertical towards God and the horizontal towards man.

But what exactly is the end of this journey, the words of the hymnist tell us: we walk with the Lord, "so that we may live with him" and "so that we may be lifted up to the upper Jerusalem, in the kingdom of heaven". Our purpose is to live close to Christ, to be united with Him, in a union that no one can break: "What can separate

us from the love of Christ?" asks Paul (Rom. 8:35).

This path to union with Christ is a completely conscious and voluntary path, so we must be constantly turned to God, to always keep in mind our final goal, which is not of this world nor is it locked in temporality and individuality, but has an eschatological dimension: it is the upper Jerusalem, the Kingdom of Heaven, where "the divine light shines" and where there is "the clear sound of those who celebrate".

This upper Jerusalem the Lord promises us and calls us to it, without denying and scorning this world, to turn our minds and hearts towards it, because the true triumph of God's children takes place not on earth but above, in the secret Jerusalem. Our ascetic and mystical tradition on this upward journey towards upper Jerusalem calls us to be vigilant, not to be overcome by the sleep into which our sins and failures drag us into".











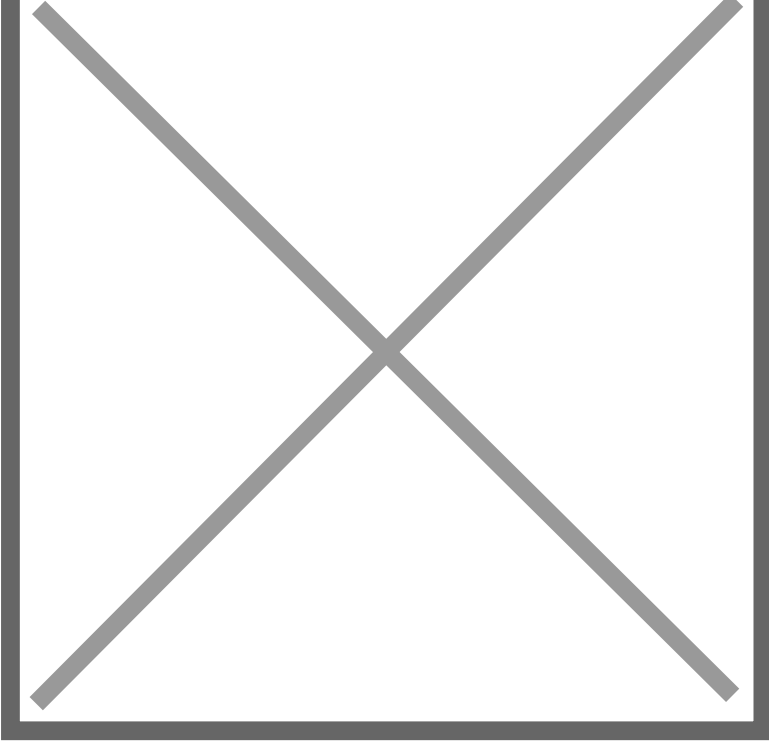
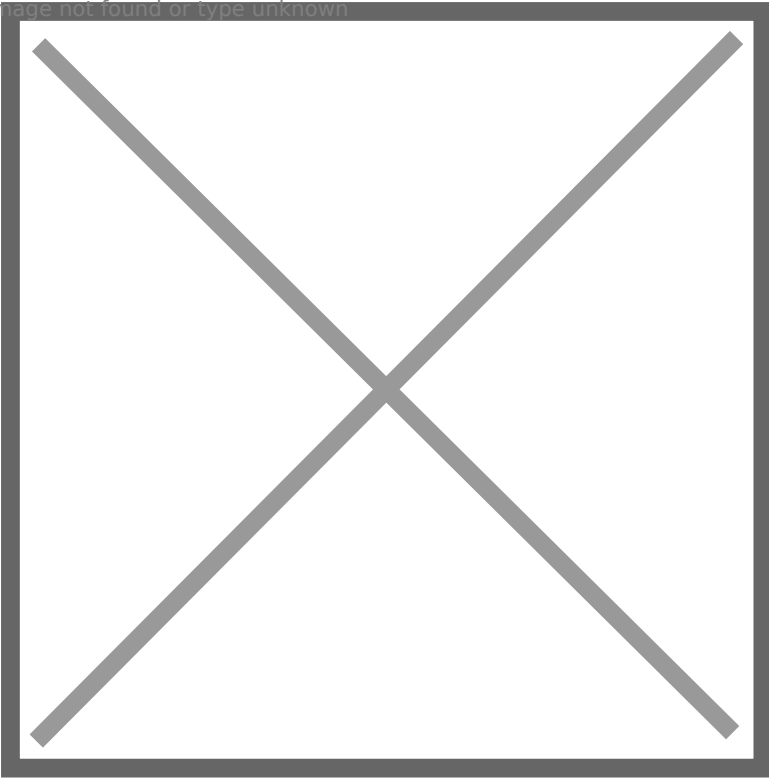
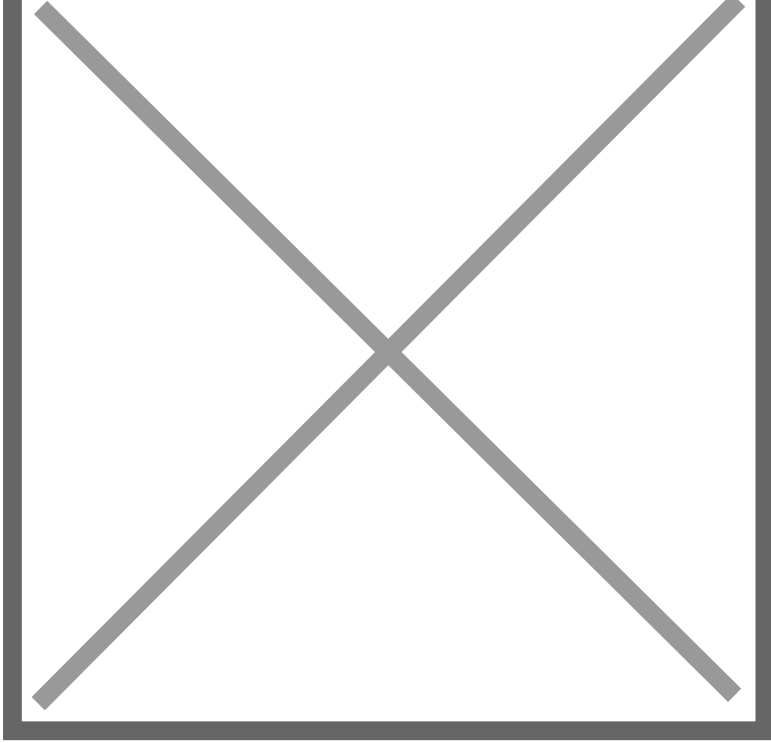


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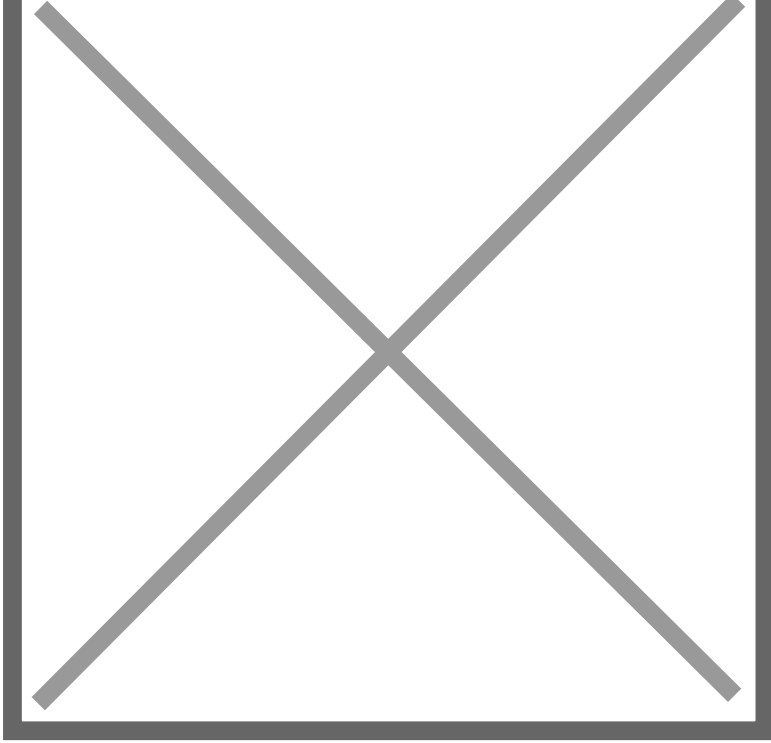
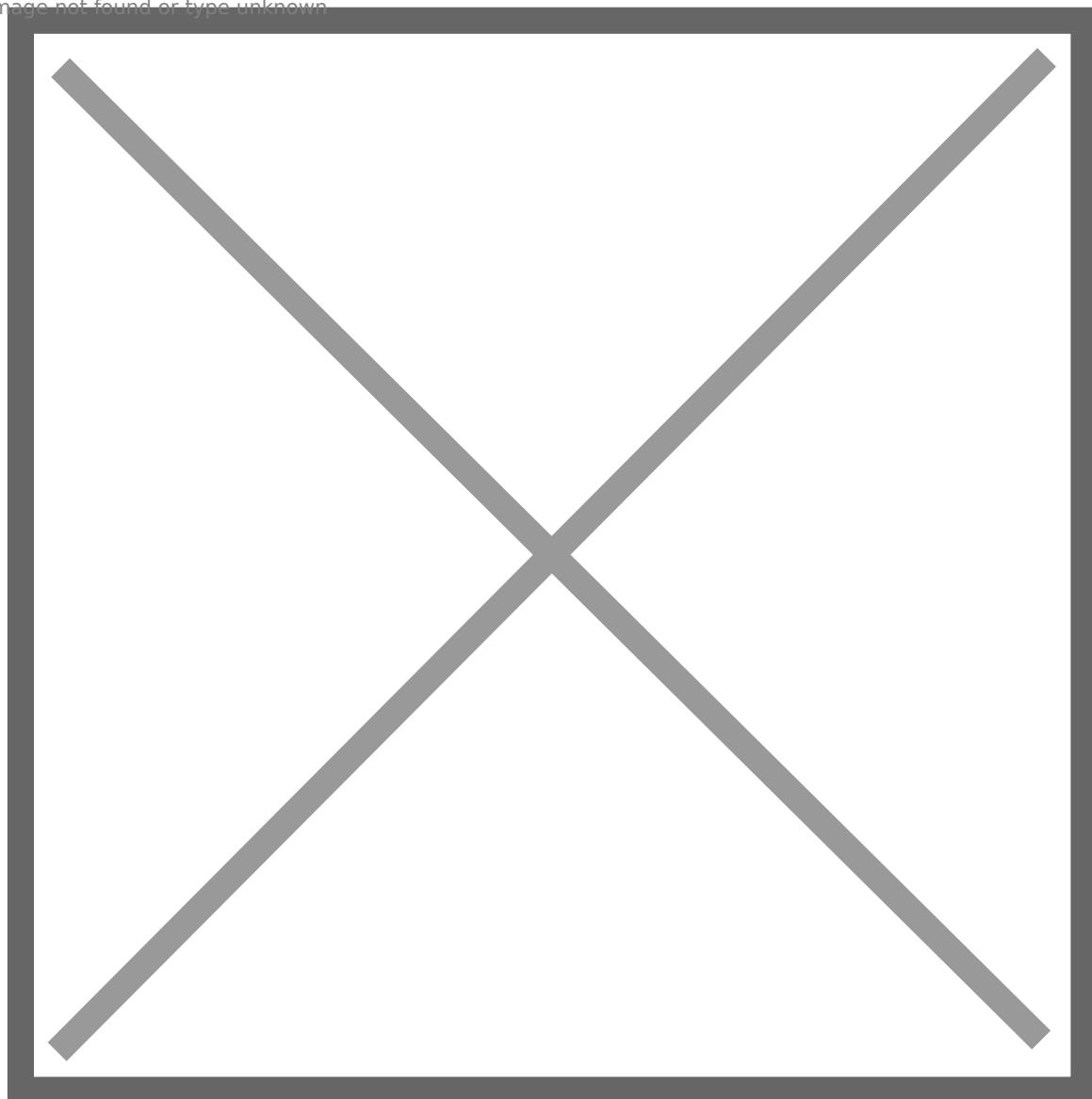


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