

Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for the Great Vespers of the Descent from the Cross, Holy Friday 2023



Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We have arrived at this moment – a very painful moment in Holy Week, when we behold with our eyes, and we hear with our ears, the dire effects of hatred, envy, greed, and every kind of sin. We behold the Lord, in the Service we call Ἀποκαθήλωσις, the Descent from the Cross, without the breath of life. His brutalized form hangs in death between heaven and earth. A shocking sight to the Angels and heartbreaking one for his Mother and His Disciples.

The grim and agonizing work of taking down the Lord from His Cross was accomplished by Joseph of Arimathea and by Nikodemos. Both of them were prominent in the Judean community. Joseph was even a member of the Sanhedrin, the body of elders that conspired to put the Lord to death, but they were also secret disciples of the Lord.

It was Joseph who came forward when the hour was darkest, even begging Pilate for the Body of the Lord. For it says, in the Gospel of Saint Mark:

As the evening was fast approaching, since it was Friday (the Day of Preparation), Joseph of Arimathea, an honorable member of the Sanhedrin who eagerly expected the Kingdom of God, boldly went to see Pilate to beg for the body of Jesus. Pilate was amazed that Jesus had died so soon and summoned the centurion, asking him if He was dead. And after he was informed by the centurion, the Body was given to Joseph. *

What must Joseph have been thinking at that moment? He was the κεκρυμμένος μαθητής – the hidden disciple who had avoided associating with the Lord in public. Was he afraid? Worried about his position? His reputation?

Now, he is exposed to the most powerful man in Palestine, who had ordered the execution of his beloved Rabbi, Jesus. Now, everyone will know that he was one of the Lord's followers.

The Disciples, fearing for their lives, are in hiding, but Joseph, who was hidden, is now revealed as a man of courage and boldness. Joseph is revealed as a loving parent, for he buried Jesus in his own tomb.

Joseph is manifest as a second father to the Lord's adopted father Joseph. The Betrothed of the Theotokos was a carpenter; he hammered nails into wood. With fear and trembling, Joseph of Arimathea pulled the Son of Man's hands and feet from the nails hammered into the Wood of the Cross.

And Joseph is revealed as a supreme mystic of the age to come, for he was granted to cover the nakedness of the Lord, Who covered our sins with His love, His mercy, and His divine forgiveness.

Today, my beloved Christians, we are called to be a Joseph of Arimathea for our Lord. I know, we think of ourselves as children of God, and so we are. But today, let us be parents to our Lord, let us have the spirit and the will of Joseph of Arimathea.

Let us go to the Cross and accept the consequences of sin – the death of our Savior. Let us not hide from the horrors of His Crucifixion, which was accomplished for our sake. Let us take out the nails from His hands and His feet, by which I mean – let us take out of our hearts every hateful thought and intention.

Let us cover the nakedness of the Lord – as we chant, σινδόνι καθαρᾷ εἰλήσας καὶ ἄρώμασιν, by which I mean – let us cover the sins of others and not expose them to

ridicule or embarrassment.

And finally let us, and lay Him in the new tomb of our hearts – ἐν μνήματι καινῷ
κηδεύσας ἀπέθετο, by which I mean – let us enshrine Him in our hearts and minds
as the Lord of our lives.

If we do so, we shall surely greet the Lord at His Empty Tomb on the glorious
morning of the Resurrection.

Γένοιτο. So be it. Amen.

Καλή Ἀνάσταση!

* Mark 15:42-45.

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