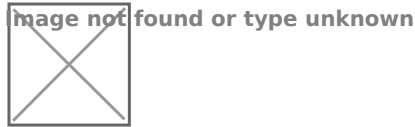


## **Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for the Divine Liturgy of the First Resurrection, Holy Saturday 2023**



Beloved in Christ,

Today we gather in the deep silence of this Sabbath of Sabbaths, in which the Lord rests in His Divine Flesh within the Tomb. Now is the time when we keep watch, in eager expectation of the triumph to come. As the special Χερουβικόν we chant today says:

Σιγησάτω πᾶσα σὰρξ βροτεία, καὶ στήτω μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου, καὶ μηδὲν γήϊνον ἐν ἑαυτῇ λογιζέσθω.

Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and stand with fear and trembling; and let it take no thought for any earthly thing.\*

Indeed, my dear Brothers and Sisters, we keep silence and interior stillness in the presence of this profound mystery, the Sabbath of Rest of our Lord in the Tomb. We hear the ancient prophecies of this day – there are fifteen by tradition – that were used for this Baptismal Liturgy. Today, the Catechumens went down into the Font of Rebirth, just as Christ descended into the grave and beyond, in order to be reborn.

For this Sabbath, this Seventh Day of the week is even greater than the Seventh Day on which God rested from the creation of the visible and invisible worlds.† On this Holy and Great Saturday, God the Son rested from His work of re-creating our human nature. In willingly dying upon the Cross, He made it possible for each and every human person to be reborn with Him by His Resurrection from the dead. He made it possible for our lives to be utterly transformed. He made it possible for us to live in the highest potential of our created form, as loving, merciful, compassionate, forgiving and altruistic persons.

In taking His rest on the Seventh Day, the Lord Jesus fills all things with Himself, as is said in one of the final prayers of the Proskomidi:

Ἐν τάφῳ σωματικῶς, ἐν ᾗδου δὲ μετὰ ψυχῆς ὡς Θεός· ἐν Παραδείσῳ δὲ ληστοῦ, καὶ ἐν θρόνῳ ὑπῆρχες Χριστέ, μετὰ Πατρὸς καὶ Πνεύματος, πάντα πληρῶν ὁ ἀπερίγραπτος.

In the Tomb with Your Body, in Hades with Your soul as God, in Paradise with the Thief, and on the throne, O Christ, with the Father and the Spirit – You Who cannot be encompassed, fill all things.

In death He transcends every limitation of space and time. And by descending into the realm of the dead, He offers them the same eternal life that He offers us. No one is left behind. In the Scriptures that are read today, there are so many images and metaphors, that manifest the truth of our Faith.

But for me, there is one that speaks directly to us. It is in the Prophecy of Daniel, when the Angel of the Lord descends into the Fiery Furnace with the Three Holy Youths, and protects them from the burning fire.†

We see in the very same image the Incarnation and at the same time, the Descent into Hell. For there is no danger, no suffering, no sickness that we can experience, that God will not join. He is with us in every aspect of our human experience except one ... sin. And by being present with us, even to the point of death and lying in a tomb, He redeems our human condition, in unseen and unforeseen ways.

The Righteous Women who were with the Panagia, Joseph and Nikodemos, could not see the Lord's Descent and Conquest of Hell. They only saw the stone that was rolled before the entryway of the Tomb. But though the Garden where He was buried was shrouded in silence, in the netherworld of the dead, there was a triumphant cry of the Angels of God who accompanied their Lord and King, as He burst the gates of Hell asunder.

That is why we cry: Ἀνάστα ὁ Θεός! Arise O God! Because we know in our hearts that as He is risen from the dead, and so shall it be for every one of us, who believe in His Holy Name, and live in His Holy Light. Amen.

Καλή Ἀνάσταση!

\* The Cherubic Hymn of Holy Saturday.

† Cf. Genesis 2:2.

‡ Cf. Daniel 3:49,50 (LXX).

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