

HIS BEATITUDE THEOPHILOS III ADDRESS AT THE DIVINE LITURGY AT THE USPENSKI CATHEDRAL IN HELSINKI.

His Beatitude Theophilos III, Patriarch of Jerusalem

12 September 2010

Your Eminence, Archbishop Leo,

Your Eminence, Metropolitan Ambrosios,

Your Eminences,

Dear Fathers of this Cathedral,

Respected Civic and Governmental Leaders,

Brothers and Sisters,

We come to this historic and holy church with deep joy, and we thank you, dear Metropolitan Ambrosios, for your brotherly welcome to concelebrate this Liturgy in your Cathedral. We also thank you, dear Archbishop Leo, for the warm hospitality that you have shown to us throughout our fraternal visitation of the Finnish Orthodox Church.

We also wish to acknowledge the presence of respected civic and governmental leaders here today. The Finnish Orthodox Church enjoys a special place in the life of the people of Finland, and shares with the Evangelical Lutheran Church the position of a national church. This is a proper acknowledgement of the role that the Orthodox Church has played in the history of this region, and we rejoice in the ability of the Finnish Orthodox Church to exercise its

important ministry freely in this country.

This great Uspenski Cathedral is dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God. Founded in the middle of the 19th century, this church is said to be the largest Orthodox Church building in Western and Northern Europe, and it has shined as a beacon of hope in good times and in bad. As we celebrate this Liturgy today, we remember in our prayers all those who labored, and suffered, on behalf of all the people of this region in times of trouble and pressure. This holy church, itself an icon of heaven on earth, has been for many generations a sign of the enduring hope that is ours in God through Our Lord Jesus Christ, and through the prayers and protection of his All-pure Mother.

On the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, which we celebrated only a few days ago at the end of August, we sang this hymn:

“She who is higher than the heavens and more glorious than the cherubim, she who is held in greater honour than all creation she, who by reason of her surpassing purity became the receiver of the everlasting Essence, today commends her most pure soul into the hands of her Son. With her all things are filled with joy, and she bestows great mercy upon us”.

With these words the hymn writer patriarch Anatolios describes the wondrous and paradoxical even of the Dormition. For “the source of life is laid in the tomb, and the tomb itself becomes a ladder to heaven”.

The apostles were gathered miraculously from the corners of the world to be present at the Virgin’s death and her empty tomb is a testament both to her natural death, and to her *metastasis*, her *translation*, into the hands of her Son. As we sing, “At the departing, O Virgin Mother of God, to him who was ineffably born of thee, James the first bishop and brother of the Lord was there, and so was Peter... and the whole sacred

fellowship of the apostles". As the successor of James, the Patriarch of Jerusalem is the living link to this sacred event, and as the continuation of the apostolic community, we Orthodox throughout the world represent in our own day this apostolic witness to the fullness of faith. And so we are able to participate in this Eucharist in this great cathedral in the salvific events of our sacred history.

The blessing of the Mother of God remains with us. From her was born the Incarnate Logos, the God –man who took on our own human life for the sake of destroying death and giving life to the whole creation. And through her witness, we receive the unblemished Orthodox faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ. She it was who entered into the mystery that had been hidden from the beginning of the ages, and so by her obedience she enables us also to share in this same divine inheritance. In this and every Eucharist, we too are caught up in the mystery of the Incarnation, of the union of heaven and earth of the promise of *theosis*.

For the Mother of God, her witness began from the moment that she conceived: "*she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit*". (Mt,1:18). So the creative energy of the Holy Spirit moved in her, and we sing:

"In giving birth, O Mother of God, thou hast retained thy virginity, and in falling asleep thou hast not forsaken the world. Thou who art the Mother of Life hast passed over into life, and by thy prayers thou dost deliver our souls from death".

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the *Theotokos* and our God, confirmed his two natures by dying as man and rising as God. In the same way, the Mother of God was content to die according he law of nature so that the mystery of the divine *oeconomia* should not be seen by the unfaithful to be an illusion.

We are therefore invited, dear brothers and sisters to open our hearts to the divine *oeconomia*, to the salvation of God, and to lay our hope before the Mother of God, who is also our Mother. This Great cathedral, dedicated to her Dormition, stands as a reminder to us of the promises of God that are made known to us in her life, death and *metastasis* and that are our inheritance of faith. We, too, are shown the way to eternal life, and in this way we do not journey alone, but we journey in the company of the Virgin Mary and all the saints, whose presence surrounds us mystically here in this liturgical gathering.

Let us join our voices with the hymn writer and praise the Mother of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, and entrust ourselves to her prayers, saying:

"From all generations we call thee blessed, O Virgin Mother of God: for Christ who cannot be contained was pleased to be contained in thee. Blessed also are we in having thee as our succour: for day and night thou dost intercede for us...Therefore, singing thy praises we cry aloud to thee: Hail, thou who art full of grace, the Lord is with thee".

As we return to the Holy Land, we carry with us affectionate remembrances of our days among you here in your beloved Finland. We pray that the ties that bind the Patriarchate of Jerusalem with the Finnish Orthodox Church and all the Finnish people will be strengthened in the years to come, and we look forward to welcoming you in pilgrimage to the Holy Places, and especially to Jerusalem, of course.

We thank you once again, Your Eminence, Archbishop Leo, our brother bishops in Finland and all the Orthodox faithful for the graciousness that you have shown us. And we express our deep gratitude to the President of Finland, the Honorable Tarja Halonen, and all the civic leaders who have so courteously welcomed us to this wonderful country.

May Christ our Lord, through the prayers of his All-Pure Mother, continue to bless this great country and all your people.

Amen.