## MESSAGE BY H.B. THEOPHILOS, PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM, ON THE OCCASION OF EASTER 2016

24/04/2016

In the Holy City of Jerusalem, EASTER 2016

## THEOPHILOS III

By the grace of God Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and all Palestine

of all the congregation of the Church, grace and mercy and peace

from the Holy Sepulchre
of the Resurrected Christ.

"Hail, O Holy Sion,

mother of Churches,

dwelling of God;

For you were the first to receive

the absolution of sins

through the Resurrection"

(Vesper's *sticheron* of the Resurrection, tone d).

There was, in the early matutinal hours, darkness engulfing the tomb where the Crucified Jesus Christ the Nazarene, king of the Jews, had been buried. Abounding darkness too in the minds of Mary and the other women who had gone with her to the monument. Added to the sorrow of the Cross was the bewilderment before the view of the stone taken away, perplexity at the sight of the empty tomb, and despair because "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they had put him!" (Jn 20, 2).

But God was faithfully "administering salvation on earth". God, who had wanted to save mankind through the incarnation and crucifixion of His Son the Monogenes, did not leave Him in the tomb to waste away. Christ, crucified and buried, was resurrected by the power of the Father and His divine competence. He vanquished the forces of the darkness and Hades, the devil, and rose from the dead, encountering Adam and his genus.

This hopeful message "by a pair of light-bringing angels" inside the tomb was proclaimed to Mary Magdalene and her accompanying women, transforming their sorrow to joy. This joy was infinitely augmented by the view of Jesus Himself, with the wounds of the nails upon His palms, resurrected, bright and glorified, telling them "Greetings", upon which "they took hold of His feet and worshipped Him" (Matthew 18,9).

Eye witnesses of this supernatural fact of the resurrection of the Crucified Jesus Christ from the dead were not only the Myrrhbearers but also the Disciples, who had rushed to the tomb and they too saw "the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself" (Jn 20, 7).

To confirm His Resurrection to the apostles "whom the Lord had chosen, He gave many convictions that He was alive" (Acts 1, 2-3), as in the gallery "on the evening of that first day of

the week" (Jn 20, 19), on the way to Emmaus, when "He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself" (Luke 24, 27), and when "He blessed the bread" (Luke 24, 30) on the Tiberian Sea, when He asked them for "something to eat" and on His instruction "they hauled in the net full of fish" (Jn 21 5-6) and "He took the bread and gave it to them and He did the same with the fish" (John 21, 13) and when "He led them out to Bethany" (Luke 24, 50) and "before the eyes of the disciples, He was taken up to heavens" (Acts 1, 9) and sat on the right of the Father and sanctified, glorified and deified our human nature.

Then, fulfilling His promise, the Lord sent from the Father another Paraclete that illuminated their intellect "in tongues of fire and they spoke in other languages" (Acts 2, 3) of the greatness of God, first in Jerusalem and from there to the ends of the earth, entrancing the world and attracting with their preaching several peoples aboard the ship of the Church.

The Church, the Holy Body of Christ, acquired by His honest blood, springing by Him on earth and sealed by the Holy Spirit, has been assigned to perform His redeeming work across the world. The Church preaches dialogue, reconciliation and peace; it heals man's wounds, it sanctifies and saves him, consoles him spiritually and relieves him materially, shares its bread with the poor and the needy and offers tangible support to castaways, refugees and victims of violence and terrorism.

The Church of Jerusalem, the Holy Sion, the first to receive absolution of sins through the Resurrection, guardian of the Holy Lands as silent witnesses to the appearance of Christ on earth, extends wishes from the Most Holy and Life-giving Sepulchre, to its flock and to pious pilgrims: health, peace, stability, prosperity and a joyful festive period, proclaiming in unspoken joy "Christ Has Risen"!

With Paternal and Patriarchal blessings,

## Ardently blesser in the Lord,

## THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem