

A SERMON FOR THE FEAST OF SAINT GEORGE AT THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX MISSION TO THE HOLY LAND.

6 May 2016

Christ is risen.

Today, having just celebrated the glorious Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us celebrate with joy the bright Feast of Saint George the Trophy Bearer, who was, as the hymnographer of the Church reminds us, “the Great Martyr of the love of Christ.”

This love of Christ has been shown to us in the cross and in the Resurrection, The divine mystery of the Church is in fact founded on the blood of the Cross and is sealed by the empty tomb. Here is the heart of the Christian life, for as Saint Paul reminds us, “if Christ has not been raised; then our proclamation has been in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14). The empty tomb is the eloquent testimony to the love of Christ, of which Saint George is a great witness.

Indeed, it is Christ’s Resurrection that has inspired the cloud of countless martyrs and saints down the ages, and even in our own day, who turned their back on the joys and glory of this earthly life. They longed instead for the invisible and heavenly citizenship of the eternal city.

It was this same power of the proclamation of the Resurrection of which Saint Paul speaks that enabled the Holy Apostles to travel throughout the known World – the oikoumenie – to

establish the Church in every place.

It is this same power of the proclamation of the Resurrection that has established us here, in the Holy Land, the land of the martyrdom of Christ's love.

The Cross of Christ shows us Christ's complete kenosis – his complete self-emptying -and it is this martyrdom of the cross that forms us into the guardians and servants of the empty Cross and the empty Tomb. For neither the cross nor the tomb were stronger than the love of Christ, the love which turned the tree of shame into the tree of glory, and which turned the tomb into a bed of hope.

Every time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy together and partake of the Eucharistic Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, we declare our unity in this same love of Christ.

This is our experience of Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit, as we participate in this mystery together with the invisible presence of the saints and martyrs of Christ surround us here.

The Holy and Great Martyr Saint George, a son of this Holy Land, has given us his blessing to be here together on this feast in the light that shines from the empty Tomb, so that we may proclaim in our generation the Good News of Christ's Resurrection and His philanthropy to all humankind. Christ's righteousness is the light of truth, and our spiritual mission is to be a beacon of that truth. Unlike Pontius Pilate, who asked "What is truth," we declare and proclaim by our very life what the truth is. The Christian presence in the Holy Land is a manifestation of Christ's truth, and the Holy Places are an eloquent witness to the truth that we proclaim.

This truth draws the world to our doorstep. This truth inspires thousands of pilgrims to journey here every year, to find at the Holy Places spiritual refreshment and the strength to persevere in a world that is filled with fear, violence,

confusion, and hardship. This truth sustains our fellow Christians in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East. This truth gives life to all who come to the empty cross and the empty tomb in search of "that peace that passes all understanding" (Phil 4:7).

May the Holy and Great Martyr Saint George, the great witness of the love of Christ, pray for us, and by the intercession of the Most Holy Mother of God the Theotokos let us proclaim together with the great hymnographer, Saint John of Damascus, saying

The shadow of the law passed away when grace arrived;

for, as the bush wrapped in flame did not burn,

so did the Virgin give birth and yet remain a virgin,

*In place of the pillar of fire, the Sun of righteousness hath
shone forth.*

Instead of Moses, Christ is come, the salvation of our souls.

(Paschal Vespers)

May we live in the light of the love of Christ, and find the strength to proclaim the joy and the hope of the Resurrection, so that we declare our unity in Christ.

Christ is risen! Amen.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem