

# THE EPITAPH SERVICE AT THE PATRIARCHATE (2017)

At 11:00pm on Holy and Great Friday, 1st/14th April 2017, the Epitaph service which is about the God-saving Burial of our Lord and God Jesus Christ was observed at the Most Holy Church of the Resurrection.

For this Service, the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood with its guest Archbishop Leon of Finland, led by our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, descended to the Most Holy Church of the Resurrection, bells tolling in a mourning tone, and through the Deposition and the Holy Sepulchre entered the Catholicon.

There, the Canon of the Holy and Great Saturday was sung until the Priests received the blessing by the Patriarch and they were dressed with their liturgical vestments with the Archbishops alike.

Then the entourage went as usual out of the Catholicon, and turned right towards the Shrine "Touch me not" of the Franciscans where a prayer was read aloud. This was repeated at each one of the Shrines outside the Edicule from North to South, which are The Stolen, St. Logginos, They divided my garments among them, the Crown of Thorns and of Adam.

From this Shrine the Entourage went up in the Horrendous Golgotha. There the Gospel narrative on Christ's Crucifixion was read, a prayer followed and the veneration by the Patriarch, the Archbishops and the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos. Then four Archbishops carried the silk corporal symbolizing the grave garments of the Lord, which was laid on the Holy Altar of the Horrendous Golgotha and went down and placed it on the Holy Deposition slab, when His Beatitude read the relevant Gospel narrative on the Deposition and Burial of the Lord by Joseph of Arimathea

and Nicodemus the secret disciple of the Lord. Consequently the litany around the Holy Sepulchre followed, while during the whole service the chanting was done by the Choir Leader of the Church of the Resurrection Archimandrite Aristovoulos, Mr. George Alvanos and their helpers.

At the end of the Litany, the singing of the Lamentations began by His Beatitude and the Archbishops followed by the choir and the congregation in the three Stases:

1. "Thou who art the Life wast laid in a tomb o Christ..."
2. "It is right to magnify Thee, Giver of Life..."
3. "Every generation, O my Christ, offers praises at Thy burial..."

At the end of the three stases and before the sessional hymns, Geronda Secretary-General Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina gave the following sermon:

*"I venerate Thy Passion, I sing in praises of Thy burial,*

*and I magnify Thy power, O loving Lord:*

*through them I am set free from corrupting passions"*

*(From the 1<sup>st</sup> Stasis of Lamentations)*

*Your Beatitude Father and Master, Reverend chorea of Hierarchs,*

*Your Excellency Consul General of Greece, Noble Priests and pious pilgrims,*

*If man is the crest of God's creatures, and creation, the "quite good" world that surrounds him are thought of and received by the faithful as the foremost wondrous work of God, an even more wondrous new work of God is received and experienced in the last years, that is the likeness of God to man, the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. This event was*

foreseen and foretold by the prophets and evangelized by the angel to Virgin Mary. The Virgin by the Holy Spirit conceived and begot in the flesh the Only Begotten son and pre-eternal bodiless Logos of God.

This incarnate Logos of God, the God-man Jesus Christ of Nazareth, having migrated in earth, lived in Judea, Galilee and Samaria, at the time of Octavian Augustus and Pontius Pilate. He was baptized by John in the Jordan. He chose the twelve apostles. He consorted with people. These "little ones" He named His brothers. He healed them from their illnesses, in many ways He did good, he resurrected the dead. He taught the perfect law of love and forgiveness. In His one Hypostasis He was perfect God and perfect man in two natures. He took upon Himself all human passions, even death, even death on the cross. He willingly gave His life for us according to His Father's command (John 10:17). In order to liberate us, he willingly accepted, "suffered" death, to which by their own free and ill will the people "who loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:17) condemned Him. They were the ones who saw in Him not the liberator from sin but the transgressor of the law.

However, there were those people, "the fertile soil" where the seed of His teaching had fallen; The ones who discerned the light and the truth of life in Him. Members of this "small team" were the women who followed Him from Galilee, who also became the eye witnesses of His Crucifixion. To the same team also belongs Joseph from Arimathea, who dared to come to Pilate, when at the ninth hour Jesus said in a loud voice "it is accomplished" and as human gave up the ghost, and died on the cross. Then Joseph the subtler "took up the mourning asking, how will I bury Thee my God" and alongside with the myrrh-bearing women was granted the blessed task of Jesus' deposition from the wood and burial of His divine body.

This three-fold event, the cross, the deposition and the burial of our Lord Jesus Christ is commemorated by the Church

today, at this hour when the Holy and Great Friday is almost over and the dawn of Holy and Great Saturday draws near. The Church, His holy body, holds this memorial in gratitude, because the Lord bought it (the Church) by His sacred blood, because the Church sprang forth from the blood that was poured out by His pierced side. The Church chants in joyful mourning but also in hope, complete happiness and deep thanksgiving because its Lord "destroyed death by His cross, to the thief He opened paradise, in one day He made him worthy of paradise". The Church preaches to the world that the Lord granted this mystery of the salvation by His cross, even to those who have fallen asleep, to those who for ages have been captives to the devil due to their many sins, and are placed in the corruption of death. To those St. John the Forerunner had worked his mission. He had preached repentance also to those who were in Hades. For the sake of those, Christ descended in Hades. The Church chants that by His descend in Hades, Christ "resurrected the dead from the depths of the earth" and instead of the sufferings of Hades He granted them "to be with Him in paradise" the eternal life with Him.

This grant of the completion of man, meaning his communion with God, to coexist with Him in life and death, is the fruit of "the weakness of Christ's cross". Christ lived "by God's power" because He willingly accepted the passions, beatings, mockery, the crown of thorns, the spear and death. Through all these for our sakes, Christ passed on to His glory. "These were meant for Christ to suffer and then come again to His glory". Christ's glory is His cross, which is the choice of God's love for man, without negating the responsibility that lies with those who crucified Him. Christ became incarnate in order to be crucified, and Christ was resurrected because He was crucified. Christ is the king of glory on the cross. Through His cross, joy came to the whole world. The Church familiarizes itself with this mystery, accepting to suffer along with Him. To the Church it is granted "on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His

sake" (Philip. 1:29). The Church suffers along with Christ "crucified along with Him", cleansing itself from corruptive passions, mortified for Him, "buried along with Him in His death" in the font, in baptism. Being weak in Christ, the Church lives by God's power in it (2 Cor. 13:4) and perpetuates the life-giving and salvific mission of Christ in the world; it preaches Him to be the fullness of life and perfection, the sacrificial love and forgiveness. Fulfilling this mission, the Church is glorified along with Christ.

The Church of Jerusalem, which has been blessed to serve Christ's mission in the places where He lived as God-man, and especially in this vacant, blessed and life-giving sepulchre, where "He fell asleep in the flesh as mortal", honouring His passion, burial and resurrection, has preserved this like the pupil of an eye, by the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood throughout the centuries. It maintained and rehabilitated recently the erected by Komnenos Sacred Edicule, this "Possession and tribute to Christ of the Orthodox Romans", under the technical study of the National Technical University, by the initiative of the Head of the Church of Zion and officiating this feast, His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, in praise of the blessed nation of the Orthodox Romans and glory of our Trinitarian God.

From the All-Holy and Life-giving Sepulchre, the Church of Jerusalem and Mother of Churches wishes to those honouring it with their presence, the Orthodox pilgrims of all the Orthodox nations, the patience of the crucified in the flesh, the power of our God Jesus Christ who died in the flesh and the joy, peace and exultation of the forthcoming feast of His Resurrection. So be it".

This was followed by the blessings, praises and Doxology, when His Beatitude and the Archbishops venerated the Holy Sepulchre.

At the end of the Doxology the Patriarchal entourage dismissed

the ceremony at the Catholicon and returned to the Patriarchate waiting for the Service of the Holy Light.

From Secretariat-General

<http://youtu.be/jIyiVxQEHdg>

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