

THOMAS SUNDAY IN CANA OF GALILEE

On Sunday, 10th/23rd April 2017, Thomas Sunday, the event of the touching of the Lord by the Apostle Thomas was celebrated by the Patriarchate in Cana of Galilee.

The Church commemorates on this feast that the Resurrected Lord appeared to His disciples "on the evening of that day the first of the Sabbaths", which was the evening of the first day of the Resurrection, when Thomas was not with them and did not believe that the Lord was resurrected; then after eight days, the Lord appeared again "when the doors were closed", Thomas was with them and was encouraged by the Lord to touch Him and then Thomas said "My Lord and my God" (John 20:24-29).

It has been a custom for this event to be celebrated in Cana of Galilee on the eight day after the day of the Resurrection.

The feast was led by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, who was initially welcomed by the Scouts at the beginning of the road leading to the Holy Monastery of Cana, and then by the dressed in their liturgical vestments Priests before the Holy Church of St. George of the Holy Monastery of Cana, with co-officiating the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, Geronda Secretary-General Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, and the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and Arab speaking Priests who serve at the Holy Monasteries and Parishes of the Patriarchate in the Holy Archdiocese of Nazareth, Arcdeacon Marc and Deacon Anastasios. Singing were the choir signers men and women of this Parish in Greek and Arabic, with the participation of the noble Orthodox Congregation of Cana and the neighbouring

towns, as well as noble pilgrims from Greece, Cyprus, Russia and Romania.

To the noble congregation His Beatitude preached the divine word as follows:

“Come let us drink a new drink, not one marvelously brought forth from a barren rock, but the Source of incorruption, which springeth forth from the grave of Christ, in Whom we are established” the hymn writer of the Church proclaims.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims,

The luminous feast of the Resurrection of our Saviour Christ, which (rising) brought us from the corruption of death unto eternal life, brought us also together on this day in this sacred place of Cana in Galilee, so that we may celebrate in thanksgiving, meaning liturgically, the memory of the “beginning of miracles (that) did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him” (John 2:11) as John the Evangelist witnesses.

“The beginning of miracles” through which Jesus revealed His glory is the turning of water into wine “the water was made wine” (John 2:9) at His presence at the wedding of His friend Simon the Cananite.

It is known that the water is a necessary ingredient for the biological function of the human body. That is why according to the book of Exodus in the Old Testament, Prophet Moses stroke the rock in mount Horeb – at the Lord’s command – and water sprang forth from it and the people drank it (Exod. 17:6). This water, which was natural, came out miraculously from a barren rock, meaning not fertile nor productive. This moreover is what Jesus told the Samaritan woman “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

In other words, the water that Christ gives is His Holy Spirit which He gave to His disciples and Apostles after His resurrection. And this is so because the Resurrection of Christ on the third day transformed the tomb of corruption into a spring of incorruption, meaning to a tomb of eternal life. Behold thus, why we are called to “drink a new drink”.

Therefore, the “new drink” is no other than the Sacred and Living blood of our Resurrected God and Saviour Christ, in Whom we are called to become communicants and participants. The “new drink” is the blood of Christ, meaning the “blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mat.26:28). The “new drink” refers to eternal life and our own resurrection on the last Day of Judgment. “Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him” (John 6:54-56) says the Lord.

The indeed great and holy sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, known as “the Lord’s supper” is a foretaste of the joy and gladness of the Supper in the Kingdom of Heaven. “These are my very body and blood. Just as He marvellously deified the flesh He took upon Himself, (Christ) likewise confidentially converts these into His very life-giving body and His sacred blood” Zigavinos teaches.

Jesus Christ’s presence as that of His Mother’s at the wedding of our blessed town of Cana, as well as the turning of the water into fine wine, has also a reference to the spiritual wedding, meaning the bond of the Church as bride with Christ as the bridegroom.

In this spiritual wedding in the Kingdom of God the Father, His Only Begotten Son and Logos will drink of the new wine, “the fruit of the vine”, meaning the new and good wine

together with His friends: "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Mat. 26:29).

Our Lord Jesus Christ and His luminous Resurrection are the steadfast foundation of our faith to Christ crucified and resurrected, as St. Paul preaches: "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:10-11). This is moreover confirmed and witnessed by the Apostle Thomas, who said to his fellow disciples: "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again...came Jesus and stood in the midst... Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God" (John 20:25-28).

Yes, my beloved brothers, Christ is the cornerstone which was rejected by the builders (1 Peter 2:6). "And he that believeth on him shall not be confounded" (1 Peter 2:6). Christ, St. Paul preaches, having come into the world, "preached peace to those who were afar off and to them that were nigh" (Ephes. 2:17).

No one is able to realize this peace of the Resurrected Christ, "except a man be born again" meaning "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit" (John 3:3,5). And this is so because "that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6) says the Lord.

Great is indeed the mystery of Christ's Divine Providence. Let us therefore worship the Holy Resurrection of Christ and say together with the hymn writer: "Even as Thou camest in the midst of Thy disciples, O Saviour, and gavest them peace, come also among us and save us" and grant peace to our region and the whole world. Christ is risen!"

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a litany three times around the Holy Church, and the litany was followed by a ceremony of the Sunday School at the courtyard of the Holy Church and a Paschal meal, offered by the Hegoumen Archimandrite Chrysostom.

At the refectory His Beatitude gave the following address:

"It is the day of Resurrection; let us be radiant for the festival and let us embrace one another. Let us say, O brethren even to those that hate us: Let us forgive all things on the Resurrection; and thus let us cry: Christ is risen from the dead, by death hath He trampled down death, and on those in the graves hath He bestowed life".

Your Excellency Mr. Mayor,

Honourable Vestry men of the Church,

Beloved Brothers in Christ,

The feast of feasts and the festival of festivals, the day of the Resurrection of our Saviour Jesus Christ concerns the whole world, especially in our contemporary era when humankind experiences confusion and fear, being dazzled by the rapid technological development but also despaired by the surrounding disorder, the fratricidal wars and terrorism.

The feast of the Resurrection is of a special significance to the inhabitants of the Holy Land. And this is so because it is from the Holy Land and from the Holy City of Jerusalem that Christ's Light shone forth, the Light of hope, love, peace and

reconciliation.

In that case, our town of Cana of Galilee is a living witness of the Light of Resurrection, of peace and of the harmonious co-existence between its Muslim and Christian citizens. The unceasing through the centuries presence of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate (Rum Orthodox) of Jerusalem with its faithful Christian members in Cana, is an undeniable proof that indeed in this sacred and hagiographic place, our Lord Jesus Christ made the beginning of miracles and revealed His glory.

And the revealed glory of God is no other than His infinite love and philanthropy. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20).

During our humble service as the Hegoumen of this sacred Shrine known as "The wedding in Cana" but also as its spiritual shepherd, we have become communicants of this loving experience among the citizens of Cana.

Today, a festal day of our blessed town of Cana, our honourable entourage of Archbishops and Priests with Us, have been deemed worthy of participating in its joy and gladness.

Just as you the citizens of Cana boast in Christ for this sacred place, likewise we also, the Spiritual Leadership, boast in Christ for you and your town.

And we say this because the sacred Shrine of the Wedding in Cana just as the here worked miracle of the turning of the water into fine wine, is a place of comfort, spiritual recreation as well as of divine strengthening for all the incoming visitors and noble pilgrims from the ends of the world.

For all these, we express our warmest thanksgiving especially to our most beloved representative and Hegoumen, Reverend

Archimandrite Chrysostom and his most respected associates, Mr. Housan Abdelnour, Adnan Matar, and Aissa Jaraiske etc., and we conclude with the encouraging words of Paul the Apostle who says: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work." (2 Thess.2"15-17). Christ is risen!"

All things concluded, His Beatitude made pastoral visits in Cana and soon afterwards departed for Jerusalem.

From Secretariat-General

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