THE 1ST STASIS OF THE AKATHIST AT THE PATRIARCHATE

The Canon of the Theotokos and the 1st Stasis of the Salutations of the All-Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary were officiated by His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, on Friday afternoon of the 1st Week of Great Lent, February 10/23, 2018, at the Catholicon of the All-holy Church of the Resurrection. The right choir was led by Archimandrite Aristovoulos and the left by Mr. George Alvanos, while the service was attended by a large congregation of monks, nuns, and laity. The service was also attended by the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos.

After the Service and the dismissal, His Beatitude preached the Divine Word and wished the congregation a blessed Great Lent as follows;

"An Angel and the chiefest among them, was sent from Heaven to cry: Rejoice! To the Mother of God. And beholding Thee, O Lord, taking bodily form, he stood in awe, and with his bodiless voice he cried aloud to her such things as these: Rejoice thou through whom joy shall shine forth. Rejoice, thou through whom the curse shall be blotted out. Rejoice thou the Restoration of fallen Adam. Rejoice, thou the Redemption of the tears of Eve", the hymn writer of the Church says.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians,

Our Holy Church, honouring on the one hand the great and sacred mystery of God's providence, and on the other, our Most Blessed Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, has established the Service of "The Akathist", or "The Salutations of the

Theotokos", which is held during the fasting weeks of the Holy and Great Lent.

The purpose of fasting in general and of the Holy Lent in particular refers to the health of both body and soul of the faithful members of Christ's Church. It is not appropriate not to rejoice for the health of the soul but grieve over the changing of our diet, and thus appear to care more for the pleasure of the flesh rather than the diligence of the soul, St. Basil the Great says, and he defines fasting as "a medicine counterbalancing sin".

After His baptism in the river Jordan, our Lord Jesus Christ was taken by the Holy Spirit in the desert, where He fasted "for forty days and forty nights" (Mat.4: 1-2). And He did that before He preached the Gospel for the salvation of man, and of course before His passion in the flesh, the three-day burial and His Resurrection from the dead.

On other words, Christ is the One Who wants all men to be saved and receive the full knowledge of truth through faith. "Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:4-5) St. Paul preaches.

No one, my dear brothers, can attain to the fullness of the truth in Christ, without the confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, Who has come down to earth from heaven for our salvation and has become incarnate through the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit and became man.

In other words, the historic person Virgin Mary, was deemed worthy to become the Mother of God. And the Theotokos became the Mother of God, because the Only Begotten Son and Word of God, was conceived as human in her womb, gestated in her vital organs and was held in her arms and breastfed from her breasts.

This great and strange and paradox mystery to which the only truthful witness is Virgin Mary from Nazareth, is interpreted theologically by the composer of the hymn which is the introduction of the Archangel Gabriel when he was sent from heaven to tell Theotokos "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" (Luke 1:28).

Christ, my dear brothers, is the joy of the world, which has been shown forth through the Virgin Mary. And this is because through the Most Blessed Theotokos, the Divine Word put upon Himself our human nature according to St. Andrew of Crete ; "O Virgin inviolate and Mother of God who hast not known man, from thee has God, the Creator of the ages, taken human flesh, uniting to Himself the nature of men."

The conceived by the Virgin Mary and united in the Holy Spirit human nature of God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, is the one which brought forth the redemption from the curse of the first created couple. It is His human nature the one that recalled the fall of the first Adam and saved Eve from the tears of sorrow. For this reason the melodist says: "Rejoice — Theotokos Mary — thou through whom creation is renewed". This is the "renewal of the human nature that Christ made", according to Theodoritos Kyrou.

Since the purpose of the Holy Lent is our renewal in Christ, our rebirth through repentance, therefore the Most Blessed and Ever-Virgin Theotokos Mary is projected during the fasting period, because it is through her that our human nature was renewed and revived. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). So, anyone who is united with Christ, is a new creation in Christ. The old state which was formed by the law and sin has faded. Behold, all things are new, St. Paul preaches (2 Cor. 5:17).

Our Holy Church calls us, my dear brothers, to prepare ourselves through fasting, which is indeed the

counterbalancing medicine of sin, but also through repentance, which is the strength of salvation. According to St. John of the Ladder, repentance is the daughter of hope, the renouncing of despair. Let us therefore prepare ourselves, my dear ones, so that we may be deemed worthy to celebrate the Resurrection of our Saviour Christ and along with Him our common resurrection from sin. "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" St. Paul says (1 Cor. 5:7).

Let us entreat our Most Holy Theotokos, and Mother of God and say along with the hymn writer: "Theotokos the hope and protection of those who sing thy praises, take from me the yoke of sin and, Pure Lady, accept me in repentance." Amen. Have a Blessed Great Lent and a Happy Easter."

From Secretariat-General

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