

THE EPITAPH SERVICE AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Good Friday night, March 24/April 6, 2018, the Epitaph Service took place at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and all Monasteries of the Patriarchate.

This contrite and modest service was led by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrant Hagiotaphite Archbishops of the Throne and the Most Reverend Mark of Serbia, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and visiting Priests from other Churches.

The canon of Holy Saturday was sung at the beginning of the service.

Then the Patriarchal Entourage came out of the Catholicon and went up to the Horrendous Golgotha via all the Shrines outside the Catholicon at each of whom there was a stop with a special prayer.

Then the 7th Gospel of the Holy Passion was read, which narrates the Lord's Cross (Mat. 27:33-54), and there was a special prayer followed by veneration.

After the narrative, four Archbishops took the silk corporal which symbolizes the body of Christ, and placed it on the slab of the Holy Deposition, having completed three circles around it, and the Patriarch read the Gospel of Deposition, according to St. John.

This was followed by the procession three times around the Holy Sepulchre, with the Archbishops holding the silk corporal, and after the procession the silk corporal representing the Body of the Lord was placed on the slab of the Holy Sepulchre.

At the end of the procession, the three stases of the Epitaph Lamentations began;

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..." with the Patriarch offering incense while at the previous two stases the incense was offered by the Archbishops according to their ranking place.

Before the evlogitaria the sermon of the day was delivered by Geronda Secretary-General, Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina as follows;

Sermon of Geronda Secretary-General

Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina

At the Epitaph Service on Holy and Great Friday

(24 March/6 April 2018)

Your Beatitude Father and Master,

Reverend chorea of Hierarchs,

Your Excellency Consul General of Greece,

Devout clergy,

Noble pilgrims,

God in His philanthropy honoured man, when in the beginning He brought him into "being", created him according to His image and likeness and placed him to live in the world "considering it to be quite good". When man embezzled his gift of free will, and was led to his fall and corruption, then

God, by His ineffable philanthropy honoured man again. He offered man "prosperity" through His Only Begotten Son, in Whom He was well pleased. At the end of times He sent Him in the world and He became man, incarnate, by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, taking upon Himself our human nature with its irreproachable characteristics; hunger, thirst, toil and death, namely the separation of the soul from the body.

The One Who was born in Bethlehem during the reign of Caesar Octavius Augustus, Who lived in Nazareth and was called Jesus of Nazareth, was associated with the people, taught them love as a manner of living, even love for the enemies, fed the hungry, cured the incurably sick, resurrected the dead, called "the least ones", the homeless and the prisoners His brothers – "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Mat. 25:40) – had compassion on man, healing the sick even on the day of Sabbath, for as He said, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Those wounded by sin and despised by society were to Him worthy of healing, restitution and salvation. He taught that He did all these deeds according to the Will of His Father, from Whom He came forth. At the High Priest's question "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" (Mark 14:61), He boldly answered "I am" (Mark 14:62). The people considered these words a blasphemy (Mark 14:64). They did not see the God-man in Jesus the Nazarene, but a person who "being a man, made Himself God" (John 10:33), therefore, they bound Him with ropes and sent Him to Pontius Pilate the Governor, who in a trial-parody delivered Him to them, in order to be crucified. Having derided and smitten Him down, they crucified Him in Golgotha, the place of skull, while the whole creation was lamenting and trembling with fear.

At the good will of the Father, Christ willingly accepted this death, again revealing the fullness of His love for man "to give his life a ransom for many" (Mat. 20:28),

“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2), “who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). According to the Apostle of Nations, Paul the Great, “with the blood of His cross, Christ reconciled the two worlds, God’s Israel and us the nations (Gentiles), the sons of the Covenant and us, who at that time were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world, and made us all one new man” (Eph. 2:11-17). “That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Eph. 3:6).

Having suffered dispassionately as God, and died as man on the cross, Christ descended into Hades and looked there also for the sheep that was astray. As the Orthodox hymnology chants, “When Thou didst descend unto death, O Life immortal, then didst Thou slay Hades with the lightning of Thy Divinity...and Thou didst raise the dead out of the nethermost depths”. “Thou didst abolish death by Thy Cross; Thou didst open Paradise to the thief”. “Thou stood before those in Hades, calling aloud to them, enter again into Paradise”. “Thou hast despoiled Hades, and wast not tried thereby, and Thou hast opened for us the Paradise of old”. As the God-bearer Father of the Church St. John Damascene says, “He descended into Hades, with a deified soul, and having released those who had forever been bound there, He was instantly revived from the dead, leading the way to our resurrection” (Publ. Orthodox Faith, 73).

The event of Christ’s Life-giving Cross and His burial in God’s body does the Church celebrate this venerable evening of Holy and Great Friday, before the dawn of Holy and Great Saturday; the Church that has been gushed forth from His pierced side. It celebrates not in a spirit of a weeping lamentation for His death, but in a spirit of a modest hopeful

chant of the epitaph, foreshadowing the feast of the Resurrection.

At this Feast, let St. John Damascene from the Lavra of St. Savvas seal the word by saying the following about the Cross; "Every deed and wonder of Christ is great and divine and marvellous, but most wondrous of all is His Cross, through Which death has been abolished, Hades has been despoiled, resurrection has been granted, our nature sat at the right side of God, we have become sons and heirs of God... the Cross has been given to us as a sign on our foreheads, a shield and trophy against the devil, dissuasive of all evils, cause of all good things, refutation of sin, plant of resurrection, wood of life eternal. This sacred wood, on which Christ gave Himself a sacrifice for us, is worshiped as truly venerable since it has been sanctified by the contact of the holy body and blood, and likewise, worshiped are the nails, the spear, the garments and the sacred places where He abided, which are the manger, the cave, the Golgotha of redemption, the life-giving tomb, Zion, the acropolis of the Churches" (Pub. Orthodox Faith, 84).

The Mother and "acropolis of the Churches", the guardian of the Divine Shrines, under its Head and Officiator of this Feast of the Epitaph, His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, wishes to its congregation on all parts of the earth and to the noble pilgrims that honour it, the strength of our Lord, Who was crucified in the flesh and suffered the termination of His life in the flesh as a mortal King, and the delight of the light of His Resurrection. So be it.

The service continued with the "evlogitaria", praises, readings, intercession and dismissal. The return to the Patriarchate was done under the mournful bell tolling.

From Secretariat-General

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder" order_by="sortorder"

```
order_direction="ASC"  
maximum_entity_count="500"]
```

```
returns="included"
```

```
httpv://youtu.be/y3XmXtq7sIA
```