

HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM CELEBRATES THE D. LITURGY AT SARANTARION MOUNT

On Sunday April 1/14, 2019, 5th Sunday of Great Lent, and day of the commemoration of our Righteous Mother Mary of Egypt, His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos officiated the Divine Liturgy at the Holy Church of the Annunciation in Sarantaron Mount. His Beatitude's entourage were the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Hegoumen of the H. Monastery of St. John the Baptist by the River Jordan Archimandrite Bartholomew, the Hegoumen of the H. Monastery of St. Gerasimos of the Jordan Archimandrite Chrysostom, the Choir singer Archimandrite Demetrios, Archdeacon Mark and Deacon Sophrony, while He was welcomed by Archimandrite Gerasimos, who is the Hegoumen and renovator of this Monastery and of the renovator of the Monastery of St. John the Baptist by the River Jordan.

Before the Holy Communion, His Beatitude addressed all present with the following Sermon;

"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:13-14) Paul, the great Apostle of the nations, preaches.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians

The grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us in this Holy place, on the high mountain where our Lord Jesus Christ fasted for forty days and was tempted by the devil, in order to worship the Living God on the one hand, and to partake of the Holy and sacred mysteries of the precious body and life-giving blood of our God and Saviour Christ.

Today, the fifth Sunday of the Great Lent, our Holy Church commemorates our Righteous Mother Mary of Egypt, who having lived in an indecent manner for seventeen years, she then decided to change her life and turn to God in repentance. For this reason she retreated to the deepest desert of the Jordan river, where she led a very harsh life for forty years, surpassing her human nature, in unceasing prayer and having Christ as an example "who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, [and] purge[s] our conscience from dead works" (Hebrews 9:14).

And according to St. Paul, it is the blood of Christ that can purge our conscience from dead works, meaning the works of sin, which infect consciousness and cause necrosis to the humans.

In other words, the purging of our consciousness is accomplished with the working of Christ's blood in us, without which [the blood] the worship of the Living God is impossible. Theophylaktos says; "the one who is manifesting dead works does not worship the True Living God, but [worships] the works, and deifies them. In that manner the man who loves food deifies his stomach, and similarly the greedy man commits idolatry". And St. Chrysostom says; "the one who does dead works does not serve the Living God". And this is so because the sin darkens the mind, infects the consciousness and alienates man from God. Only when our soul is pure and our consciousness cleansed from sin can we worship the true God and our Lord in a manner pleasing to Him, as St. Paul says: "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with

reverence and godly fear" (Hebrews 12:28).

Through the redeeming blood of the cross our Lord Jesus Christ banished the death of sin and granted us the possibility of salvation eternally, namely the deliverance from the bondage of sin. Therefore St. Paul advises us; "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).

Being the mystical body and the head of His Church, our Lord Jesus Christ gave His disciples and Apostles power by saying; "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose so ever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose so ever sins ye retain, they are retained (John 20:22-23). Moreover, the Church is considered to be the representation of Noah's ark, "wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" as St. Peter says (1 Peter 3:20-21).

In other words, the salvation through Noah's ark, prefigured the salvation through the font and the baptism. And baptism is not only the cleansing of the flesh from impurity, but also a fervent supplication to God, that He may give us a clean consciousness, free from any compunction. And the baptism saves us by the power of the resurrection of Christ.

Baptism, my dear brothers and sisters, is no other than the fundamental mystery of repentance, according to the Lord's preaching; "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:13). And the Christians in Jerusalem glorified God while listening to St. Peter's preaching who said: "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). St. Paul also urges his disciple Timothy by saying; "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In

meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will" (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

Also prophet Ezekiel says that God is a God of mercy, and every sinner can be saved if he repents. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezekiel 33:11).

Invoking this very kindness and philanthropy and the infinite mercy of God, St. Paul says; "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3:5-6). And the "washing of regeneration" is the mystery of repentance through which man washes his soul and cleanses his consciousness. St. John the Evangelist says, "But if we walk in the light [of God] the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Of this washing of regeneration, namely of the mystery of repentance but also of the precious blood of Christ, did Saint Mary of Egypt partake, a Saint who through her harsh striving and of course through the power of the Precious Cross, washed away the crimes of sin and granted to us the fruits of repentance; therefore, we entreat her along with the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary to have pity on us and deliver us from every impurity of our passions. Amen.

Many Happy returns and a blessed Easter!"

During this visit the expert scientists from the University of Athens and the University of Thessalonica began the first stage of their project for the fixation of the rock of Sarantaron Mount and of the Church within it.

From Secretariat-General