

THE FEAST OF JOSEPH OF ARIMATHAEA AND OF THE MYRRH-BEARING WOMEN IN REMLI

On Sunday, April 29/ May 12, 2019, the commemoration of the Myrrh-bearing Women and of St. Joseph of Arimathaea who asked from Pilate the body of the Lord to bury it was celebrated in Remli, the Ancient Arimathaea.

The Divine Liturgy for this feast at the Holy Church of St. George that belongs to the Patriarchate was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos with co-celebrants the Most Reverend Archbishops; Damascene of Joppa, Aristarchos of Constantina, Methodios of Tabor, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks among whom Archimandrite Meletios, Archimandrite Ieronymos, Fr. Joseph who was visiting from the Church of Czech Republic, and Archdeacon Mark. The chanting was delivered by the Byzantine singer of Remli Community Elias, and the service was attended by members of the Greek Embassy in Tel Aviv, and the faithful Christians of the Remli community.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude read the following Sermon:

“Let us arise in the deep dawn and, instead of myrrh, offer praise to the Master; and we shall see Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, Who causeth life to dawn for all” St. John Damascene says.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims

The sun of righteousness, the resurrected Christ who has caused life to dawn for all has gathered us today in order to

honour Joseph of Arimathaea in his hometown Arimathaea (Remli), along with his fellow-disciple of Christ Nicodemus. We also commemorate the reverend Myrrh-bearing Women.

The Myrrh-bearing Women are those who went to the Tomb of Jesus Christ "in deep dawn" as St. Luke the Evangelist says: "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared" (Luke 24:1). Joseph and Nicodemus are the secret disciples of Christ who undertook the task of burying the sacred body of Christ as St. John the Evangelist says: "And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight" (John 19:38-39).

Both the Myrrh-bearing Women and the secret disciples of Christ Joseph and Nicodemus are the true witnesses of the burial and resurrection of Christ. For this reason our Holy Church honours and projects them and through them calls us to participate in the joy of the Resurrection of Christ, offering our God and Master the Paschal hymn instead of myrrh.

In other words, we are called to see Christ, Who is the sun of righteousness with the noetic eyes of our soul. We are called to participate not to the Passover, in which the Jewish people celebrated their passage through the red sea, from the Egyptian bondage to their freedom, through the Divine intervention, but instead, we are called, according to St. Gregory the Theologian to enter the Pascha of the Divine Grace, namely of the resurrection of Christ, through which we accomplish our passage "from death to life and from earth to heaven". We accomplish our communion with the resurrected Christ, for this reason St. Gregory the Theologian says: "0

Pascha the great and sacred and purifying for the whole world". Without our communion with Christ we remain in the necrosis of sin and of its bondage. "The one who does not see and hear and feel things in spirit, is dead" St. Gregory of Sinai says.

Indeed, my dear brothers and sisters, the one who accepts Christ has Christ living in him, as He said: "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6:56), and "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).

Interpreting these words of the Lord, Zigavinos says: "The birth is not carnal but spiritual. Therefore, while the carnal birth is felt with the senses, the spiritual one is felt in thought and there is no need to examine with feelings what is felt in thought, neither to give a human dimension to the divine things".

In other words the resurrection of our God and Saviour Christ refers to our rebirth as St. Paul preaches: "according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5). This very Holy Spirit of the regeneration did Christ give to those who believe in His resurrection: "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (1 John 4:13) St. John the Evangelist and Apostle says. The bearers of the Spirit ascetic Fathers stress the fact that when man welcomes in him the resurrected Christ, Christ becomes his second soul; "the resurrection is a second soul to the people" St. Neilos says.

In order to become partaker of this experience, the man who is composed of body and soul and from bodily and psychic senses, has the need of catharsis (spiritual cleansing) as St. John Damascene says in his hymn "Let us purify our senses and we shall behold Christ, radiant with the unapproachable light of the resurrection, and we shall clearly hear Him say; Rejoice!

As we sing the triumphal hymn”.

The unapproachable light of the resurrection, namely of the glory of Christ did the Myrrh-bearing Women along with Joseph and Nicodemus see, both with their spiritual and natural eyes. For this reason the Myrrh-bearing Women were eye-witnesses of the Resurrection, while Joseph and Nicodemus of the burial.

Behold why the Synaxarist of the Church says: “On this day, the third Sunday of Pascha, we celebrate the feast of the Holy Myrrh-bearing Women. And also we commemorate Joseph of Arimathaea, the secret disciple, and Nicodemus, the disciple by night”

The Godly-wise Myrrh-bearing Women are those who evangelized the resurrection of Christ to His disciples, as St. John Damascene says in his hymn: “The godly-wise women followed after Thee in haste with sweet-smelling myrrh. But Him whom they sought in tears as dead, they joyfully adored as the living God and announced unto Thy disciples O Christ the glad tidings of the mystical pascha”.

This mystical annunciation of Pascha, namely of the Resurrection, are we also called to embrace, my dear brothers and sisters, imitating the Christian thinking, which is the big love, the devotion and also the boldness of the Myrrh-bearing Women, who “went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they anything to any man; for they were afraid” (Mark 16:8), as well as that of Joseph and Nicodemus who displayed the same love and devotion and the same courage; “Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus” (Mark 15:43).

The resurrection of Christ, my dear Christians is nothing else but the Kingdom of God, “who hath called us unto his kingdom and glory” (1 Thes. 2:12) St. Paul preaches. Amen. Christ is

Risen!

After the Dismissal of the Divine Liturgy, Archimandrite Niphon, the energetic Hegoumen who has renovated the Church and the Monastery, offered a reception at the Hegoumeneion, and spoke to the congregation, while His Beatitude also said the following;

“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:3-4) St. Paul preaches.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our Holy Church of Jerusalem has the holy privilege to honour and venerate the commemoration of the Myrrh-bearing Women and of the secret disciples of Christ, Joseph and Nicodemus, in this very city of Arimathaea, the contemporary Remli.

Today’s feast, which in essence refers to the feast of feasts and the festival of all festivals, Pascha, is not any celebration that can be seen physically, but a spiritual and internal one. The purpose of the Christian faith and life is one and only; the co-resurrection with the resurrected Christ. “He, who was initiated in the esoteric power of the resurrection has known by experience the reason why Christ created the world” St. Maximus the Confessor says.

St. Paul calls the Christians “to live a new life” (Romans 6:4). Our new life in Christ is necessary and obligatory if we want to avoid the spiritual death as St. Paul says: “For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God” (Romans 8:13-14).

The purpose and mission of our Rum Orthodox Patriarchate, namely of the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem, has always been the safe-guarding and the ministry of the All-holy Shrines on the one hand, and the pastoral care of the Christian congregation on the other, which means the preservation of their cultural, traditional, and especially their national-religious identity, as well as the preaching of the love, righteousness and peace of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ who was resurrected from the dead. Christ is Risen!

After this address, His Beatitude offered a Priest's cross to Archimandrite Niphon in recognition of his devoted ministry as Hegoumen of Remli and to his helper for the last seventeen years Nun Fevronia, He offered a cross and an icon of the Holy Sepulchre. At noon, the Community Council offered a meal at a city restaurant.

From Secretariat-General