

THE FEAST OF THE DORMITION OF THEOTOKOS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Friday, August 15/28, 2020, the Patriarchate celebrated the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God. This Feast was celebrated at the Shrine of the Dormition in Gethsemane where the Tomb of Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary lies, which was built by St. Helen in 326 A.D. and from the Sovereigns Markianos and Poulcheria in 417 A.D.

Vespers was held at 5.00 o'clock in the afternoon, led by His Eminence Archbishop Theophanes of Gerassa, with the co-celebration of Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, Arab-speaking Priests, Hierodeacon Sophronios and the participation of faithful who venerate the Most Holy Theotokos who was buried there and was translated into heavens by Her Son and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

On the morning of the Feast Day the Divine Liturgy was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants their Eminences Archbishops Theophanes of Gerassa, Aristarchos of Constantina, Philoumenos of Pella, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, Arab-speaking Priests and Archdeacon Mark. The chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon in Greek and the members of St. James Cathedral in Arabic, as the Service was attended by many local faithful Christians, despite the restrictive measures. However, pilgrims are still unable to travel.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“The bounds of nature are overcome in thee, O immaculate Virgin; for thy childbirth is virginal, and thy death is the espousal of life. O thou who after childbirth art virgin, and who after death art living, do thou, O Theotokos, ever save

thine inheritance" the hymnographer of the Church proclaims (Minaion, August 15, Ode 9, heirmos).

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims,

Indeed, the Only One who contained beyond logic and nature the Word of God, our Blessed Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, has gathered us in this sacred place of Her Tomb, to honour Her Dormition along with the Holy Apostles who are gathered here in spirit.

"Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God"(Psalm 87:3), Prophet David chants. For which are we going to consider the city of the invisible and indescribable God, Who has everything under His own power, St. John Damascene wonders, but the Only One who indescribably contained the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. What is more glorious than accepting "the ancient true will of God", Prophet Isaiah says (Isaiah 25:1).

In Theotokos Mary all the bounds of nature were overcome, as St. Kosmas the hymnographer says: "The bounds of nature are overcome in thee O immaculate Virgin; for thy childbirth is virginal, and thy death is the espousal of life"(Ode nine, heirmos). Both the conception by the Holy Spirit and the incarnation of Christ, the Word of God, from the pure flesh of the Virgin Mary are an excess of the bounds of nature. "The Virgin [Mary] who bore [God the Word] beyond any human logic did not lose any of the signs of virginity" St. Maximus the Confessor says.

The same is said by St. Kosmas the hymnographer regarding the overcoming of the bounds of nature at the Dormition of Theotokos:

"The King, the God of all, granteth thee things beyond nature. For even as He preserved thee a virgin in childbearing, so

also in the grave He kept thy body incorrupt; and He glorified thee by a divine translation, giving thee honour as a Son to His Mother”(Ode six, troparion 2).

Being in awe before the mystery of the death of the fountain of life, of the Mother of God, St. John Damascene says: “What are we going to call this mystery of you? Death? But even if naturally your most sacred and blessed soul is separated from your most holy body and the body is given to the lawful burial, however it does not remain in the state of death, nor is it decomposed by corruption; for Her whose the virginity remained untouched through labour, Her body is also preserved incorrupt and is translated into a better and more divine tabernacle, which is not broken by death, but lives eternally throughout the ages”.

For this reason, according to St. John Damascene, the blessed Virgin is “the acropolis of the Churches” and also “the Mother of all the Churches of the world”. St. John also preaches that She “did not reach up to heaven like Prophet Elisha, She wasn’t taken up to the third heaven, like St. Paul, but reached and sat upon the very royal throne of Her Son, seeing Him face to face, and rejoicing along with the great boldness She has in Him”.

This reality, my dear brethren, that the Most Holy Theotokos is standing next to Her Son and God beholding Him face to face and having great boldness in Him, is what has made Her a refuge for all those who venerate and honour Her, as the hymnographer says: “Preserve and save, O Theotokos, thy servants from every danger; after God do all of us for refuge flee unto thee; a firm rampart art thou and our protection” (Horologion from the Canon of Theotokos).

As we stand today in this sacred Tomb of Theotokos in Gethsemane, celebrating Her Feast, let us hear our God-bearer Holy Father John Damascene in the salutation he wrote for the Mother of God and say along with him: “Let us rejoice in

spirit along with David, for the tabernacle of the Lord finds rest today. With Gabriel, the chief of the Angels let us exclaim: "Rejoice the ineffable ocean of joy, Rejoice thou who alone drives away all sorrow. Rejoice, thou who art the medicine that heals all the pains of the heart. Rejoice, thou through whom death has passed away, while life is brought back". In Christ the Son of God and our God, to Whom belongs all glory and the might, along with the Father without beginning and the All-holy and Life-giving Spirit, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen. Many happy returns".

After the Divine Liturgy, the Hegoumen, Most Reverend Archbishop Dorotheos of Avela hosted a reception for the Patriarchal entourage at the Hegoumeneion.

From Secretariat-General