

THE FEAST OF THE EXALTATION OF THE HONOURED CROSS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

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On Sunday, September 14/27, 2020, the Patriarchate celebrated the Universal Exaltation of the Sacred Cross.

On this Feast, the Church commemorates the event that took place after the completion of the construction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (326-336 A.D.) and after the Consecration Ceremony, on 13th September of the year 336 A.D., when St. Helen and Archbishop Makarios of Jerusalem exalted the Sacred Cross at the place of the Horrendous Golgotha. This was done for the crowds to see the Cross, who cried out "Lord have mercy" many times. Ever since this event has remained in our tradition, festively celebrated on 14th September every year.

For this commemoration, Great Vespers and the blessing of bread were held in the afternoon at the Catholicon of the Church of the Resurrection, after the welcoming and the veneration at the shrine of the Holy Deposition, at the Holy Sepulchre and the veneration at the Horrendous Golgotha by the members of the Holy Synod. This was followed by the incense procedure, and all preordained rituals according to the Typikon order and the Status Quo. The service was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with the Hagiotaphite Fathers co-celebrating.

On Sunday, the main Feast day, the Divine Liturgy was held at the Catholicon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, officiated by His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants the Most Reverend Metropolitan

Isychios of Kapitolias and their Eminences the Archbishops; Theophanes of Gerassa, Aristarchos of Constantina, Theodosios of Sebastia, Philoumenos of Pella, His Eminence Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis and His Eminence Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba. The chanting was delivered by the Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod Hierodeacon Simeon on the right, and Mr Vasilios Gotsopoulos on the left, as the service was attended by the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras, and members of the Greek Consulate, along with only a few faithful due to COVID-19.

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a Procession from the Catholicon through the Deposition area, down to the area of the Finding of the Sacred Cross, where the Exaltation service was held, while the Priests and the faithful were standing at the Armenian chapel of St. Helen, despite the irrational reactions of the Armenians which were against the Status Quo. From there the Procession continued left in front of the "Touch me not" shrine, marched three times around the Holy Sepulchre, and concluded up in the Horrendous Golgotha. There the Exaltation service of the Sacred Cross was held once more by His Beatitude, who held the Cross from the Holy Altar to the four points of the horizon.

Through this action, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was exalted on the Cross, was worshipped, and the commemoration of the first exaltation of the Sacred Cross by St. Helen was held. The second exaltation was held by Emperor Heraklios (629 A.D.). With these services, our senses and all universe were sanctified against the COVID-19 plague and every other opposing insult.

The return to the Patriarchate Headquarters followed, where His Beatitude addressed those present at the Reception Hall as follows;

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of

God”(1 Cor. 1:18). And in more detail, the preaching of the Cross seems to be foolishness to those who walk in the path of peril. However, to us who walk on the path of salvation, it is the power of God, St. Paul preaches.

Your Excellency Consul General of Greece Mr Evangelos Vlioras

Reverend Fathers and Brothers

Noble Christians

Today our Holy Orthodox Church celebrates the universal exaltation of the Holy and Life-giving Cross. Therefore, our Venerable Hagiotaphite Brotherhood – despite the restrictive measures against COVID-19 – came down to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre where in Parresia (boldness) we celebrated the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the ceremony of the Exaltation of the Sacred Cross, at the holy place of Its finding by St. Helen and at the Horrendous Golgotha, the place where It stood and where our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified.

Referring to the high theological significance of the Cross, St. John Damascene says: “Every action and miracle of Christ is great and wondrous, but nothing is more wondrous than His Sacred Cross. Death has been abolished by nothing else, the forefather’s sin was redeemed, Hades was put to shame, the resurrection was granted, we were given the power to defy the present and even the very death, our return to the ancient beatitude was given, the gates of heaven were opened, our nature sat at the right hand of God, we became children and heirs of God through nothing else but the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Everything has been accomplished through the Cross...Behold, Christ’s death, namely the Cross, has shielded us with the substantial wisdom and power of God”.

Indeed, as the means of Christ’s death, the Cross has surrounded us with the substantial power and wisdom of God, as it is written in the Book of Proverbs of Solomon “Happy is the man that findeth wisdom... She is a tree of life to them that

lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her”(Proverbs 3:13, 18). And this tree of life is no other than the wood of life in the centre of Paradise, which can distinguish between good and evil (Gen. 2:9, 3:22).

The special honour given to the Sacred Cross by our Holy Church is clearly expressed by St. John Damascene: “This Sacred Cross was prototyped by the wood of life in Paradise, which was planted by God; from this wood, death came, and it was through the wood that life and resurrection should be granted”.

In other words, the crucified Christ is the wood of life, namely the very Sacred Cross Itself, through which those who preach Christ crucified become communicants and participants of the power and wisdom of God, according to St. Paul: “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God”(1 Cor. 1:23-24).

And God’s power and wisdom, namely Christ, God the Word, the Saviour of the world, is the One who was made incarnate through the pure flesh of the Ever-Virgin Theotokos Mary through the Holy Spirit, as the hymnographer of the Church St. Cosmas theologically phrases: “O Theotokos, thou art a mystical paradise, which being untitled hath blossomed forth Christ, by Whom the life-bringing Tree of the Cross was planted in the earth. In worshipping Him now through its exaltation, thee do we magnify” (Katavasiae of the Cross, ode 9).

Through the exaltation of the Cross, therefore today, and “now”, we, my dear brethren, venerate and glorify Christ Himself, Who was sacrificed on the Cross, “that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works”(Titus 2:14). Amen. Many happy returns!”

From Secretariat-General