

THE FIRST STASIS OF THE AKATHIST AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Friday evening, 26 February / 11 March 2022, the Service of the First Stasis of the Akathist was observed at the Catholicon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. At this service, as the Typikon orders, the First Stasis of the Akathist was read within the Service of the Small Compline.

Before ending the service, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos who presided in the prayer delivered the following beneficial words to the faithful:

“An Angel and the chiefest among them was sent from Heaven to cry: Rejoice! To the Mother of God. And beholding Thee, O Lord, taking bodily form, he stood in awe, and with his bodiless voice he cried aloud to her such things as these: Rejoice, though through whom joy shall shine forth. Rejoice, thou through whom the curse shall be blotted out”.

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians,

Behold, the fasting has arrived, the mother of chastity, the accuser of sin and the advocate of repentance, the Angels' manner of living and the salvation of the people, the hymnographer of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church announces.

The Church of Christ rejoices and is gleeful with our entrance into the fasting period of the Holy Lent. And this, because fasting, which was dictated to us by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who “fasted forty days and forty nights” (Matt. 4:2), is indeed the salvation of the people.

And why is fasting the salvation of the people? Because

according to Saint Basil the Great, "we fell from paradise because we did not fast; let us fast, therefore, so that we may return to it". Our God the Word and Saviour Christ, who became incarnate from the pure flesh of the Virgin, is the new Adam, while the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary is the new Eve, through whom "for our sake, the bodiless receives a body, and the One without beginning receives a beginning, and the uncontainable One is contained", according to Saint John Damascene. While the hymnographer of the Church also says that the Theotokos became "the restoration of the fallen Adam, the redemption of the tears of Eve".

The Church of Christ which has been revealed to us men on earth, is the visible paradise, while Christ is the "wood of life". Therefore, Saint John the Theologian says in his Book of Revelation: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7). And in more detail, to the one who will be victorious over Satan and the struggle against sin, will I give him to eat the wood of life. Meaning, that I will deem him worthy to enjoy the eternal goods in my Father's Paradise, who according to my human nature is also my God.

The Holy God-bearing Fathers of the Church have established the service of the "Salutations to the Theotokos" during the blessed period of the Great Lent, because according to Saint John Damascene, "it is through Her that we have become citizens of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church". This means that through the Holy Baptism and the Seal of the Holy Spirit, we have been enlisted as citizens of the invisible and heavenly Church, namely of the eternal city of God, as Saint Paul says: "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13:14).

Precisely because it is not a continuing city in this world, for it has the fashion of this world (1 Cor. 7:31), "we owe to leave behind this world and run toward the future city, which

is the heaven", Saint Theophylaktos says. In other words, fasting is the safe ladder, through which we ascend for the earth to heaven.

True fasting is alienation from evil. Fasting is the beginning of repentance, Saint Basil the Great says. And according to Saint Luke the Evangelist: "God granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" Saint John the Evangelist preaches (1 John 5:11-12).

Behold again why we salute and magnify the Most Blessed Theotokos, because she became the Mother of Life, namely of the Son and Word of God, our Saviour Christ.

Therefore, let us entreat her, my dear brethren, so that by her motherly intercessions we may be deemed worthy to venerate the luminous Resurrection of the victor over death and corruption and sin, our God and Saviour Christ.

And let us say along with Saint John, the hymnographer of the Mother of God: "prolong your mercy Most-Pure Lady, to those who know you, and look favourably upon your servants and their works, and guide us all to the path of peace, for we have all set our eyes to you in hope, and we have your intercession to your Son and our Saviour and God, to whom belongs all glory, along with His Father without beginning, and the Holy Spirit, who is of One Essence with them, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen". Have a blessed Great Lent".

From Secretariat-General

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