

THE INAUGURATION OF THE RESTORATION WORK BENEATH THE ROTUNDA OF THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

The inauguration of the restoration work beneath the rotunda of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre took place on Monday morning, 1/14 March 2022.

The project is a continuation of the restoration of the Sacred Edicule which was completed four years ago. The current work shares the agreement of the Three Major Communities, the Greek-Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Custody of the Holy Land of the Franciscans and the Patriarchate of the Armenians in Jerusalem, who have the responsibility of the Status Quo, and has been undertaken by the University Sapienza of Rome.

The project includes restoration or replacement works of the damaged floor tiles on the north part of the rotunda and excavations of its underground area, beneath the Seven Arches and in front of the Sacred Edicule. It is scheduled for completion within twenty six months and will be funded by sponsors and donors.

For the beginning of this project, present at the Holy Sepulchre were the Heads of the Three Communities: H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, along with their Eminences, Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, the Archbishops, Aristarchos of Constantina and Isidoros of Hierapolis, the Elder Dragoman Archimandrite Mattheos, the Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios, the Master of Ceremonies Archimandrite Bartholomew and other Hagiotaphite Fathers, as well as the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem

Mr Evangelos Vlioras and the architect of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Mr Theodosios Mitropoulos. On the part of the Franciscans in the Holy Land there were the Custos Fr Francesco Patton, Fr Dobromiro, Fr Athanasios Makora and others, and from the Patriarchate of the Armenians, His Eminence Sevan, the Hegoumen of the Armenians Fr Samuel, Fr Gourion and others.

On the occasion of the inauguration of this project, H.H.B. addressed those present as follows:

*"Come bless the Lord all you servants of the Lord
who stand...in the house of the Lord.
Lift up your hands to the holy place,
and bless the Lord.*

(Psalm 133[134]:1-2).

Your Beatitudes,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our Respective Brotherhoods,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathered in the holiest of places in this historic moment to continue the work that has been so well begun in the restoration of the Sacred Edicule. On this occasion we remember the words of the Psalms:

*How very good and pleasant it is when brethren live together
in unity!*

(Psalm 132 [133]:1).

Five years ago this month, we gathered here to celebrate the completion of the restoration of the Sacred Edicule. That restoration was the fruit not only of the labour of experts but of our common purpose and unity in placing the restoration of the Sacred Edicule above all other concerns and distractions. As those to whom the Divine Providence has entrusted the *Diakonia* of the Holy Places, we must always deepen our commitment to this common purpose.

The restoration of the Sacred Edicule, the first in two centuries, stands as a true achievement of our Communities acting together and is a sign of hope for the world.

And now we stand at the beginning of a new phase of this work, to restore the area beneath the floor of the rotunda as well as the pavement, to ensure that the foundations of this holy place are secure for generations to come. We are deeply grateful to all those sponsors whose generosity and expertise are making this project possible, and we fully expect that his work will bring the present renovation of the sacred Edicule and the rotunda to successful completion.

We are meeting here at a difficult time for humanity. The pandemic is not yet over, there is grave conflict in Ukraine and in the world generally, there is a great deal of political, economic and social instability.

But here, in this holiest of places, that is, the Holy Tomb, there is hope. In the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, the new and eternal life of God has shone forth like a light in our dark and confused world. As we care for and restore this holy place, we participate in the message of hope that emanates from the Holy Tomb not just for the Christians, but also for people of goodwill around the world.

As we gather here, we recall the words of Saint John Chrysostom which are recited here every day:

O Lord, save your people and bless your inheritance;

protect the fullness of your Church;

and sanctify those who love the beauty of your house...

For every good gift and every perfect gift comes from above,

coming down from you, the Father of lights.

May the Almighty God, the Father of lights, whose uncreated Light shines from the Holy Tomb, bless our new work that begins today in His name.

His Beatitude Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem