THE EPITAPH SERVICE AT THE PATRIARCHATE

At 9.00 p.m. (summertime) on Good Friday evening, 9/22 April 2022, the Epitaph Service was held at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

On this feast, the chanting began with the Canon and Matins of Holy Saturday, at the Catholicon of the Church of the Resurrection.

During the chanting of the Canon His Beatitude, the Archbishops and the Priests were dressed in their mourning liturgical vestments.

Then the litany began from the Catholicon, marching on the right from the "touch me not" chapel, towards all the shrines outside the Catholicon, offering an entreaty at each of them.

At the Horrendous Golgotha, the Gospel narrative of the Crucifixion was read and the Archbishops received the silk corporal of the Epitaph from the Altar, which they placed on the Deposition Slate, below Golgotha, and the Gospel narrative was read.

Then there was a litary three times around the Sacred Edicule with the silk corporal being held by the Archbishops, which they placed on the Tomb and the 3 stasis of the Lamentations began.

The officiator of the Service, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos recited the $\mathbf{1}^{\text{st}}$ stasis, and the rest were read by the High Priests.

Then Geronda Secretary-General, His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina delivered the following Sermon:

"Your Beatitude, Father and Master,

Respected chorea of Hierarchs,

Your Excellency, Consul General of Greece,

Reverend Fathers,

Noble pilgrims,

Great and sacred is this day of Holy Friday and Holy Saturday. It is the day of commemoration of the Cross and burial of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Church chants in joyful mourning; "Today, He who suspended the earth in the waters is suspended on a cross. The Bridegroom of the Church is fixed with nails to the cross. The Son of the Virgin is pierced with a spear" and "You, O Life, were buried in a tomb, O my Christ, and angelic hosts were struck with astonishment, glorifying Your ineffable descent" and "The almighty Master is observed to be dead. He is laid within a new, unused sepulchre, He who emptied many graves of those who died".

About this event of Divine love, compassion and conciliation, Saint Chrysostom wonders in awe: "how, having risen from the royal thrones, God entered the earth and even Hades, and how the devil became an opponent not to a naked God but to a God hidden within the human nature and how death is released by death and the curse annuls curse, and through these, the tyranny of the devil in all things he prevailed is now abolished" (Homily 2 ch.1 on the Gospel according to Matthew).

This happened indeed, Christ our God went down to Hades, conquered its powers and released from it the centuries-long bound ones in fetters and slavery therein because He willingly accepted the Cross. We went down to Hades by the power of the humility of His Cross. Until the incarnate presence of His Son, God the Father granted righteousness and the salvation of people through His Law, which He wrote by His own hands, on mount Sinai and gave it to His servant Moses (Exodus 31,18).

This Law was not abolished, because the Lord said "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil the law" (Matthew 5,17), and because Saint Paul says that "the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Gal. 3,17); however, it becomes insufficient since the "the fulness of the time was come" (Gal. 4,4), ever since "Christ our God is the fulfilment of the law and the prophets", as Saint John the Baptist revealed in the River Jordan, He became "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1,29), and "by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Hebrews 9,12). He sacrificed Himself (Hebrews 7,27) and with the red colour of His own blood, He signed the New Testament of Grace. Since then, as the Apostle of the nations says, "man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2,16). "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love" (Gal. 5,6), "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3,11).

This word of the Cross, the par excellence word of the Holy and Great Friday, became "foolishness" for the ancient Greek philosophy, it is a "scandal" for the rabbinic theology, however, for Saint Paul, the twelve Apostles and the Church, it is the "power of God leading to salvation". Just as Christ entered Hades through the sign of His Cross, likewise, the Church, embracing the Cross, entered the world and enchanted it through the teaching of the Crucified Christ. Through the power of the sign of the Cross, the Church opposed the invisible evil forces and conquered them. It raised millions of martyrs, who considered death as nothing, thousands of ascetics and righteous, confessors Fathers, who lived like angels on earth and like heavenly people and illumined the minds of the people in the Holy Spirit through the decisions of Councils, to comprehend the Revelation in Christ and decorated their morals and created the Christian civilization.

The Church honours and venerates the Holy Cross and projects it as a weapon against the devil in all the manifestations of its life. Through the Cross, it sanctifies the sacraments, such as the Baptism, the Holy Eucharists, the Unction, the Sanctification of the water, it sanctifies the whole creation and exorcises every evil action from it.

Non the less, even pious emperors vanguished great armies of their enemies by the Cross of Christ. First among them with the sign "conquer in this" of the Cross was the pious emperor Constantine the Great, who conquered the opposing armies of the irreverent Maxentius. Following this, he believed in Christ and was baptised, offered freedom in the Christian faith through the decree of Mediolams in AD 312 and became equal to the Apostles, inaugurating the reigning city as the capital of the Rum Orthodox tradition. He also projected this place of the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord through the construction of this magnificent Church of the Resurrection, the beauty of which the hymnographer compares to that of the heavenly firmament. Until the end of times, this Church remains the most sacred, pan-orthodox and pan-Christian Shrine, shelter, shield and protection of the inhabitants but also of the pilgrims of the Holy Land in their religious life and its difficulties, and above all the boast of the Church of the Holy Zion. By the power of the Cross also, the pious emperor Herakleios conquered the Persians in their homeland and returned the captive Patriarch of Jerusalem Zacharias and exalted the Sacred Cross in its initial position in the Horrendous Golgotha. The Church of Jerusalem has kept like the pupil of the eye this place, which was sanctified once and for all with the divine blood of Christ, and is everyday sanctified through Christ's blood in the Holy Eucharist. This is proven by the Sacred Edicule, the work of Kalfa Komninos from Mytilini, which was constructed over difficult times of bitter bondage by our noble nation, as written herein is "a possession and offering to Christ of the Rum Orthodox in 1810". It was renovated and beautified in the year of our

salvation 2017 by the initiative and care of the Primate of the Church of Jerusalem and officiator of this Epitaph Service, His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III.

In the group of the peaceful tribes and peoples who accepted the crucified Christ as their leader, He included our Greek nation. When the Apostle of nations according to the vivid narrative of Saint Luke the Evangelist was called to speak at the Areopagus in Athens, the Athenians listened to him until the point of the resurrection of the dead. In a polite manner, they then said "we shall listen to you again". However, there were those who believed and were baptised, such as "Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (Acts 17,34). Along with Lydia the Philippian, they are the beginning of the dough of Christian Hellenism. They are its originator ancestors. Later on, Hellenism as a manner of thinking and life accepted the Revelation. It was named after the name of the Divinity of Jesus Christ. It lived up to its calling, which was petitioned when "the Greeks asked to see Jesus" (John 12,20-21). Then Jesus said, "the hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified" (John 12,23). This phrase is an honour and blessing along with the calling of our nation. Its mission continues to be the glory of the Son of man through its manner of living, through the course of history. Our nation has carried out this mission throughout the centuries, not hiding the lamp below the stand, but placing the lamp and transmitting the light of Christ to the Slavonic people through Saints Cyril and Methodios and Photios, and to the ends of the world through the Orthodox mission.

Gratefully attributing its rebirth to God, our nation is the Lord's "people, and inheritance and regime", and it is again called by both the auspicious and ominous current circumstances "to keep the good things which it has been taught" the consignment of Christ, of faith, hope, freedom,

equality, equity, righteousness, conciliation and peacemaking, the care of the sick, refugees, and the needy, chanting in its Churches "Lord, Thou hast given us Thy Cross a weapon against the devil", "Thy Cross we venerate, O Master and Thy Holy Resurrection we glorify". Deem us worthy, O Lord, to venerate Your Holy Resurrection in peace."

During praises, the High Priests venerated the silk corporal with the immaculate Body of the Lord and received the blessed rose petals.

The service concluded with the procession of the Epitaph around the Altar of the Catholicon and its placement on the Altar.

From Secretariat-General