

THE FEAST OF THE MYRRH BEARERS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

Sunday, the 17th / 30th of April 2023, was celebrated by the Patriarchate as the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women and Joseph of Arimathea in accordance with the Gospel narratives and the book of Pentecost on the 3rd Sunday of the Resurrection.

On this feast, the Church commemorates Joseph of Arimathea, the present day Ramle, who asked for and received the immaculate Body of the Lord from Pilate wrapped it in a shroud, and buried it in an empty Tomb that was close to the place of His Crucifixion. (John 19, 38-42). It also commemorates the Myrrh-bearing women, who "after the Sabbath bought perfumes, so that the Body of Jesus would be anointed, and coming to the monument they saw the stone being measured and a white angel sitting on the monument and saying "he is not here..., see the place where they placed him", (Mark 16,6). These glad tidings were announced by the myrrh bearers to the apostles and by the apostles to the whole world.

This event was celebrated in Ramle, Ancient Arimathea, Joseph's hometown, with the welcoming reception of H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos by the Scouts, Priests and Commissioners of the Community of Ramle and through the Divine Liturgy. Co-celebrants to His Beatitude were their Eminences, the Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolas, the Archbishops Damascene of Joppa and Aristarchos of Constantina, the Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios, Archimandrite Hieronymos, Arabic-speaking Priests, Archdeacon Markand Hierodeacon Dositheos. The chanting was delivered by the choir of the Ramle at the attendance of all the Orthodox Community of the City, in the presence of the representative of the Greek Embassy in Tel-Aviv Mr Kleovoulos Tsourkas and the military attaché Squadron Leader Mr Georgios Petros.

His Beatitude delivered the following sermon to this congregation:

“O Thou Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment, when Joseph with Nicodemus took Thee down from the Tree and beheld Thee dead, naked, and unburied, he struck up a compassionate dirge, and with mourning he said: Woe is me, O sweetest Jesus! When but a short while ago the sun beheld Thee hanging upon the Cross, it shrouded itself in darkness, and the earth quaked with fear, and the veil of the Temple was rent asunder. And behold, now I see Thee willingly submitting unto death for my sake. How shall I bury Thee, O my God? Or how shall I wrap Thee with winding sheets? With what hands shall I touch Thine undefiled Body? Or what dirges shall I sing at Thy departure, O Compassionate One? I magnify Thy Passion; I praise Thy Burial and Resurrection, and I cry out: O Lord glory to Thee” (Pentecostarion, Saturday of the Myrrh-bearing Women, Entreaty, Glory).

Beloved brethren in Christ,

Reverend Christians and pilgrims

The immanent light of the resurrection of our Saviour Christ has gathered us all in this holy gathering of the mystical blessing in the biblical hometown of Christ’s hidden disciples, Nicodemus, who became a Dissenter, Joseph of Arimathea and the myrrh-bearing Women, who were the first ones to witness the resurrection, so that we may celebrate in Doxology the commemoration of these Saints who witnessed the Passion and the resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the hymnographer very clearly expresses by saying: “Let the twelve disciples rejoice with us, together with the myrrh-bearing women and Joseph, and the other men and women and disciples of Christ” (Matins, Ode 3, Canon of the myrrh-bearers, Troparion 9).

It is noteworthy that the Most Holy Mother of God is the first

one who saw her Son risen from the dead according to Saint Gregory Palamas: "First among the people, as it was befitting and righteous, the Theotokos received the good news of the Lord's resurrection by the Lord Himself, and she was the first one to see Him risen and rejoice in His divine voice".

To Christ's question to His disciples, "But whom say ye that I am?" "Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ" (Mark 8, 29). And to our question, Who, or rather, what is Christ? Saint John the Evangelist replies that Christ is "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1,9).

This very light, my dear brethren, is the Resurrection of Christ, according to His own testimony, "I am the resurrection, and the life" (John 11,25), "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8,12).

According to Saint Gregory Palamas, "Christ's resurrection is the renewal of the human nature and the gaining of a new life and the return to eternal life of the condemned to death due to sin first Adam, who through death returned once more to the earth from which he was created".

Our Holy Church specially honours Christ's hidden disciples, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, the myrrh-bearing women as well as the Apostle Thomas, because they became "eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word" (Luke 1,2). Joseph is the one who came to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus (cf. Mark 15,43), and along with Nicodemus took Him down from the Cross and buried Him. While the myrrh-bearing Women "bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun" (Mark 16,1-2), and they announced to the disciples that they had seen the Lord.

As for Thomas, he touched the pierced by the spear side of

Christ and confirmed that he had seen “the side whence issued the blood, the water, the baptism, and see the wound through which man, the great wound, was healed, and except I see that He is not a spirit, but flesh and bones” (Tuesday of the 2nd week, Matins, Aposticha of Praises, Glory), as Saint John of Damascus says.

Indeed, man is the “great wound” which stemmed from his free will, “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (Eph. 2,3), as Saint Paul says. And according to Saint John the Theologian, “the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever” (1 John 2,17). Joseph of Arimathea and Joseph and the myrrh-bearing Women “gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God” (2 Cor. 8, 5).

Christ is the new Pascha (the new Paschal lamb), the one who sacrificed His life for our salvation, the lamb of God Who redeems with His blood the sin of the world, according to the hymnographer.

This new Pascha, my dear brethren, is the God-man resurrected body of Christ, namely our Holy Church, which evangelizes the One who “willingly suffered, and was buried for three days and then rose from the tomb”, the resurrection of Christ, through the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, where we taste the “sacrificed lamb” the flesh and body of Christ. “Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life” (John 6,54), the Lord says.

To this cause all of us who confess our Saviour’s resurrection are called, the ones who pay heed to the words of Saint Gregory Palamas: “If you are Joseph of Arimathea, ask for the crucified body of Christ; if you are Nicodemus, the pious disciple of the night, bury Him bathed in spices. If you are Mary, or the other Mary, of Salome, or Ioanna, let the tears flow from your eyes at dawn...and if you are Thomas, absent from the Room where the disciples were gathered when Jesus appeared

to them, when you see, do not lose faith; and if you don't believe, believe in those who talk about this; and if you don't believe in them either, become a believer when you see the marks of the nails".

Let us entreat the eye-witnesses and ministers of the passion on the cross and the resurrection of the Son of God and Son of the Ever-Virgin Theotokos, – through Whom "Hades was cast down and death was slain. Having been put to death, we were raised up and were deemed worthy of life; We received Paradise, the ancient bliss" (Sunday of the myrrh-bearers, Matins, Second Sessional Hymns, Theotokion), that they may intercede with the true God to save our souls. Amen. Christ is Risen!"

A reception followed in the reception hall, where the energetic Hegoumen Archimandrite Niphon addressed His Beatitude, thanking Him for the moral and material support at the renovating work in the Holy Church and the Monastery and for the spiritual uplifting of the Community.

Finally, a meal was offered at noon, where His Beatitude spoke again through His following address:

"For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain" (1 Cor. 15, 16-17), the apostle Paul preaches.

Your Excellencies representatives of the Greek Embassy in Tel-Aviv,

Holy Fathers and Brothers,

Reverend Hegoumen Archimandrite Niphon,

Dear President of the Ramle Community,

Most Holy Brethren

Today's commemoration of the hidden disciples of Christ Joseph the Righteous from Arimathea, i.e. of your birthplace Ramle,

as well as the holy myrrh-bearing Women is the undeniable testimony of their faith and love for the God-man Christ and His Resurrection from the dead. The Myrrh-Bearing Women “stood by the cross of Jesus” (John 19:25). The brothers Joseph and Nicodemus “took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices... Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews’ preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand” (John 19, 40-42), as the Evangelist John informs us.

This irrefutable testimony of the crucifixion, the three-day burial and the Resurrection has been denounced and preached throughout the centuries by the Holy Church of Jerusalem, especially by the living and uninterrupted historical presence of the Rum Orthodox Christians in the Holy Land.

This is due to the fact that the truth and the light of Christ overcame the fear of falsehood and darkness: “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). “But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (John 3:21).

In this judgment of the love of people in the darkness, the holy Church of Jerusalem stands up after its Christian pious flock. Needless to say, the signs of the “judgment” announced by the evangelist John are now visible and palpable in our contemporary era due to the legislative imposition of the New Order of Things.

The Greek Orthodox (Rum Orthodox) Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which is founded on the redemptive blood of Christ, is the only guarantee of the preservation of the saving inheritance, which was given to us by the Risen Christ, Who “hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a

sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7).

For this, my dear brothers, we are called upon to safeguard the precious treasure of the Evangelical Truth, whom God the Father has entrusted to His Son, and the Son of the Most Blessed Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, to those who love Him, through the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in them: "That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us", (2 Tim. 1,14), Saint Paul commanded his disciple Timothy, but also all of us.

May the light of the glorious and brilliant Resurrection of our God and Saviour Christ enlighten your heart and mind. "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life" (1 John. 5, 20), Saint John the Evangelist preaches. Amen. Christ is Risen".

This feast was also celebrated in the chapel of the Myrrh-bearing Women, at the Cathedral of Saint James the Brother of God, with Vespers in the evening and the Divine Liturgy in the morning, presided over by the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba, with the co-celebration of the Archimandrite Nicodemus, the Elder Priests of the Cathedral, Fr Farah and Fr Hader. The chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon and the students on the right and the choir of the Cathedral under Mr Rimon Kamar on the left. The service was attended by the parishioners of the Cathedral and the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem of Mr Evangelos Vlioras.

After the Divine Liturgy, a reception took place in the "Ojut" hall, organized by the association of "Myrrh-bearing Women" of Saint James.

From Secretariat-General