

THE FEAST OF THE ADORATION OF THE CROSS AND THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD IN THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

On Sunday, March 25 / April 7, 2024, the feast of the Adoration of the Holy Cross and the Annunciation of the Theotokos was celebrated by the Patriarchate in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

In the context of movable feasts, the Feast of the Cross was celebrated as a veneration of the Holy Cross for the strengthening of the faithful in the middle of the fasting period of Holy and Great Lent, and the Feast of the Annunciation in the context of immovable feasts on March 25 as the joyous news from God through the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary that from the Holy Spirit she will incarnate the Son and Word of God.

This feast was celebrated with Great Vespers on Saturday afternoon in the Catholicon of the Church of the Resurrection, presided over by our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with the co-prayer of the High Priests and the co-celebration of the priests. The chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon and Priest Ioannis Antoniou.

The feast was also celebrated in the morning with a Divine Liturgy in the Holy and Life-giving Tomb, presided over by the Most Reverend Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, with the co-celebration of their Eminences the Archbishops, Theodosios of Sebasteia and Demetrios of Lydda, and Archimandrites of the Brotherhood. The service was attended by local believers, in

the presence of the Consul Mrs Anna Madika.

After the Divine Liturgy, there was a litany three times around the Holy Sepulchre and once around the shrines.

At the end of the litany, the Episcopal procession went up to the Patriarchate where His Eminence spoke to those present and a festive treat was served.

The address of His Eminence follows below:

“Exercising the virtues is not an easy task. Beyond personal strong will, the sanctifying power of our Church is also necessary. Thus, the holy Fathers decreed, in the middle of the holy period of Great Lent, that the Holy Cross of the Lord should be worshipped, so that the faithful may receive from it grace and strength to continue with strength our spiritual struggle.

The Cross of Christ is the pride of our Church and the invincible weapon against the forces of evil. Upon it, the kingdom of the devil was crushed and his power was annihilated. From him came redemption and immortality to the human race. Our Church sings triumphantly: “Lord, your cross is our weapon against the devil...” and “Now that the Cross is appearing, it provides strength amid fasting, we willingly honour it with reverence”.

From a murderous and hateful means of execution of criminals, it changed into a means of sanctification and a mental shield of protection from the counsels of Lucifer and his dark fallen angels. Others liken it to a strong breakwater against the shocks of life, which are caused by evil and sin. The physical fatigue of fasting and the mental laziness of the spiritual struggle are two main factors that can inhibit the believer’s ascetic journey. The sanctifying power of the Cross is the antidote to this situation.

The Cross of Christ, apart from being a divine symbol of our

Church, also has a moral significance for every believer. As the Lord brought His own Cross to Golgotha, burdened with the iniquities of the entire human race, the believer of Christ carries his personal cross, the struggle for salvation and completion. The road to salvation is a real Golgotha and requires self-denial from those who climb it. The Lord confirmed it: "Whoever wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). The holy period of the Triodion is par excellence a crucifixion and a conceivable crucifixion of our passions.

That is why our holy Church dedicated this Sunday to the veneration of the Holy Cross. The faithful, drawing grace from it, now strengthened and renewed, we resist the obstacles set up by the wicked and we walk the heavenly road unscathed, guided by the joy and longing to meet our Risen Lord Jesus Christ on the holy and brilliant day of His resurrection.

Today, however, the great feast of the Adoration of the Cross coincides with another great feast of the Theotokos, the Annunciation of the Virgin and according to the evangelist Luke (1' 26-38), the Annunciation of the Virgin happened six months after the miraculous conception of John the Forerunner by Elizabeth, the wife of Zacharias, when the archangel Gabriel was sent by God to the Virgin Mariam (Mary), to announce to her that she would give birth to the Son of God. At that time, Mary lived in Nazareth of Galilee and was betrothed to the carpenter Joseph. Gabriel suddenly appeared before Mary and greeted her: "Hail, thou who art full of grace, the Lord is with thee". It was reasonable for the young woman to panic, but the archangel reassured her: "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son and shalt call his name Jesus".

As soon as she recovered from the turmoil, Mary full of wonder asked the archangel how she would conceive, since she did not know a man. Gabriel answered her that the Holy Spirit would

cover her like a cloud and would invisibly and mysteriously initiate the conception of the Son of God. To make himself more believable, he invoked Elizabeth's miraculous conception of John the Forerunner. Mary was convinced by the words of Gabriel ("Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done unto me according to your will") and the archangel Gabriel "left".

I raise a glass to the health of His Beatitude our Patriarch, Theophilos III, all of the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood and all of you. Many happy returns!"

From Secretariat-General