

THE EPITAPH SERVICE AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Good Friday night, April 20/ May 4, 2024, the Epitaph Service took place at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The canon of Holy Saturday was sung at the beginning of the service until the Patriarch and the High Priest would get dressed in their mourning liturgical vestments.

At the end of the 9th Ode, the Patriarchal Entourage came out of the Catholicon and went up to the Horrendous Golgotha via all the Shrines outside the Catholicon at each of whom there was a stop with a supplication.

Then the 7th Gospel of the Holy Passion was read, which narrates the Lord's Cross (Mat. 27:33-54), and there was a prayer followed by veneration, with the participation of the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos and the Consul Mrs Anna Mantika, under the chanting of the Choir of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

After the narrative, four Archbishops took the silk corporal which symbolizes the body of Christ, and placed it on the slab of the Holy Deposition, having completed three circles around it, and the Patriarch read the Gospel of Deposition, according to St. John.

This was followed by the procession three times around the Holy Sepulchre, with the Archbishops holding the silk corporal. After the procession, the silk corporal representing the Body of the Lord was placed on the slab of the Holy Sepulchre.

At the end of the procession, the three stasis of the Epitaph Lamentations began; 1. "Thou who art the Life was laid in a tomb Oh Christ..." 2. It is right to magnify Thee, Giver of Life..." 3.

“Every generation, O my Christ, offers praises at Thy burial...” with the Patriarch starting the first one, the second His Eminence Metropolitan Isychios of Capitolas, the third His Eminence Archbishop Theophanes of Gerash and His Eminence Dorotheos of Avila. Participants in the prayer were the Holy Sepulchre Hieromonks and Priests from the Orthodox Churches.

The sermon of the day was delivered by Geronda Secretary-General, His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina as follows;

“I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste” (Isaiah 28,16).

Your Beatitude, Father and Master,

Reverend Chorea of Hierarchs,

Your Excellency, Consul General of Greece,

Reverend Priests,

Pious pilgrims,

This luxurious and chosen stone, the cornerstone and honourable, through whom the prophet Isaiah foretold that God would place Him in the foundations of Zion, is the same whom Simeon the God-receiver recognized as “the salvation of God” and said, “ is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against” (Luke 2, 30-34). The fall of those who deny Him and the resurrection of those who accept Him. It is He through whom the Apostle of the Nations says, “ God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Cor. 5,19) and that “in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2, 9).

He is God’s Only Begotten Son and Word, incarnate by the Holy

Spirit and Mary the Virgin. He is the one who receives our human flesh, the one who brings us together as God and man, as God-man. He is the one witnessed by John the Baptist as "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Joh, 1, 29). The Father Himself, when Christ was baptized in the Jordan, revealed Himself through a voice from above, "You are my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased" (Mark. 1, 10) and the Spirit "descending upon Him in the form of a dove (Mark. 1, 10) anointed with the "Theurgical oil of rejoicing".

Anointed with the oil of the Holy Spirit by the Father's grace, He took upon His shoulders the salvation of us humans. "In His person, the human race saw the Father (Jn. 14, 8). He is, as He assured us, "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14, 6). He taught us the true way of life, as a life of offering and love to the neighbour, even to the enemies. He healed the deaf and dumb, braced the dead limbs of the paralyzed, gave sight to the blind, healed those possessed by unclean spirits and raised the dead, including His friend Lazarus the four-day dead, "confirming the general Resurrection before His passion".

Out of immeasurable mercy and unspeakable philanthropy, He concluded with the sacrifice on the Cross for us. He willingly accepted the Cross for us. According to the apostle Paul, "Yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die" (Rom. 5, 7). "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5, 8). In free and self-willed obedience, He undertook "to finish the work that the Father gave him"(John 17, 4). The Lord experienced His death as a cup, saying "This cup, which the Father has given me, do I not drink it?" (John 18, 11). He absolved our death by His very death. Death was "overcome by death", as the Church sings day and night. His death was true. It was dishonourable, shameful, painful and bitter. The Lord cried out loud from the Cross, "I thirst", but mankind, in the person of the descendants of the sons of the law and the sons of the nations, offered Him "vinegar mixed with gall" (Jn. 18,

29) " and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink" (Matt. 27, 34). In the philanthropy of God, the man returned inhumanity, because according to the approved Theologian, the blessed Elder George Florovski "the whole outburst of rage against Christ was inhuman and demonic".

Through the Cross, the Lord descended into Hades, however, the immaculate body of the redeemer of our souls "did not see the grave and corruption".

By His own power, as God, he released from Hades those under his eternal bonds, saying "Enter again into paradise", that is, enjoy without suffering in joy and rejoicing the eternal life. Because of this, from the Cross of the Lord and from here, as the Church proclaims on the day of Pentecost, "there is no death when we leave the body and depart to the Lord, but the transition from the saddest to the most useful and memorable and rest and joy". "Behold, joy has come to the whole world through the Cross." His life-giving blood, God's blood, as the dogmatic theology of the Church sings and as it is written on the slab of the Holy Altar of Golgotha, flowed when the stones of nature, of the Place of the Skull, split and through their cracks His immaculate blood flowed and washed away the pollution of our forefather buried in here and of all his descendants.

On His blood, the Lord founded the Church, His Body, so that "the gates of Hades will not have power over it" (Matt. 16,18). By the red dye of His holy blood He signed His New Testament, the Testament with all the peoples of the earth, " which did not come to destroy, but to fulfil the Old (Matt. 5, 17), saying "This is my blood of the Covenant, (Matt. 26, 28) and "this cup is the New Testament in my blood" (Luke 22, 20). From the death of the Cross sprang life for man, a force of life uncatalyzed, fountains of life and salvation. The blood of Christ, shed once upon a time on Golgotha, is poured into the blood of the Holy Eucharist, for the life and salvation of the world, enlivening and sanctifying our souls and

bodies.

Through the Cross of His Son, God answered the Greeks who failed to know Him "through wisdom" and the Jews through the request for a "sign". God promised to save both, Jews first and then Greeks through the sign of the Cross.

In the Church founded on His blood and the New Testament signed by Him, He united the two worlds, the Jewish and the Greek. Those who believe in Him, Jews and Greeks, are one in Christ, because "in Christ there is no longer Jew and Greek, barbarian, Scythian, free man". Christ was willingly crucified for them and everyone is saved in him, even those who crucified Him. If this is a "scandal" for the Jews and "stupidity" for the Greeks, for those who have received it in faith it is "the power of God and the wisdom of God".

This mystery, this free gift, this benefit, is offered by Christ through the Church to the world. He offers this through His death, saying "Take courage I have overcome the world". The Cross is the glory of Christ. Through the Cross, the Lord entered His glory. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24, 27). The Cross is the glory of Christ and the boast of the Church, "I did not boast, lest in the Cross of the Lord" says Paul. The Cross is the strength of the persecuted and those at war. With the symbol, the banner of the Cross, Byzantine emperors defeated barbarians. In this place, the emperor Heraclius brought back the Patriarch of Jerusalem Zacharia from Persian captivity and raised the holy Cross. With the power of the Cross, our ancestors freed our nation from bitter slavery. The power of the cross highlighted a multitude of martyrs and new martyrs and preserved the Roman Orthodox identity of our nation.

With the power of the holy cross, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood under its Hegoumen, His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, Primate of our feast, gives its fight for the protection of

the undeniable Pilgrimage rights of our people against foreign fraudulence and appeals for the cessation of all hostilities and the maintenance of a spirit of reconciliation and peace in the Holy Land and the world as a whole.

On this reverend and holy day, mourning in joyful mourning, the cross of Christ according to the Holy Triodion already "illuminates the dawn of the Resurrection of Christ", of which may everyone be worthy to rejoice in health. So be it."

The service continued with the "evlogitaria", praises, readings, intercession and dismissal. The return to the Patriarchate was done under the mournful bell tolling.

From Secretariat-General