

# THE FEAST OF THE MYRRH-BEARERS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

Sunday, May 6/19, 2024, was celebrated as the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing women in the Patriarchate.

## **A'. In Ramle, ancient Arimathaea**

Joseph was descended from there, who also bears the name, "Joseph of Arimathaea". Because of this, the Holy Evangelists tell us that he "came to Pilate" and "he took the body of Jesus" and buried it after the Myrrh-bearing women in the monument "near Golgotha".

For the memory of the Lord's burial under the Myrrh-bearing women and Joseph of Arimathaea and for the memory of the announcement to the myrrh-bearers that the Lord had indeed risen, His Beatitude, our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos celebrated the Divine Liturgy, right after His reception by the teachers and male and female students of the Catechetical School of the Patriarchate in Ramle in the Holy Church of Saint George of the Patriarchate. Co-celebrants to His Beatitude were their Eminences, the Archbishops, Damascene of Yaffo, Aristarchos of Constantina, Isidoros of Hierapolis, and Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, the Archimandrites, Ieronymos, Marcellus and Christodoulos, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacon Dositheos. The feast was held under the supervision of the Hegoumen and renovator of the Monastery, Archimandrite Nifon. It was attended by the faithful Christians of Ramle and its district, the teachers and students of the Patriarchate's School in Ramle, Nuns and other faithful from Jerusalem, as well as the Ambassador of Greece to Israel Mr Kyriakos Loukakis and the military Attachés of the Embassy, and the President of the Community Council of Ramle.

Before the Holy Communion, His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus’ disciple: He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered” (Matt. 27,57-58) the Evangelist Matthew writes.

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Reverend Christians,

The Grace of the Risen God and our Saviour Christ guided our journey to your city, the holy city of Arimathaea, from which the hidden disciple Joseph came, so that we may celebrate his feast after Nicodemus, the night disciple of Christ, as well as the feast of the myrrh-bearing women.

Today’s Sunday, the third after Easter, is called the Sunday of the myrrh-bearing women in honour of the brave and devoted women who, as the Evangelist Luke reports, “followed him (Jesus) from Galilee” until He was buried and remained faithful to the teaching of the One who came to the tomb, so that the body of Jesus could be anointed with myrrh, defying every danger. For they were the first to hear from the shining angel: “Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you” (Matthew 28:5-7).

Then they heard this “Rejoice” from the Risen Jesus, who met them. “And those who came to him held his feet and worshipped him” (Matthew 28:9).

Interpreting the above words, Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: that the female race benefited because it received the solution of reproach and the abolition of the curse. Because the One who told the woman in the past that she would bear her children in sorrows, now He says to the women "Rejoice" when they met in the garden of the sepulchre.

Zigavinos says: "The myrrh-bearing women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, that is, the Virgin Mary, held the feet of Jesus out of desire and honour. And Jesus did not dissuade them (=he did not prevent) them, providing they were informed (=giving them the certainty) through the message that Jesus is not a spectre, (i.e. a ghost)".

In other words, the myrrh-bearing women showed in a way that "their weak nature conquered that of men" and thus became the first true eye-witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ, as the hymnographer says: "The Myrrh-bearers, coming early in the morning, and beholding the sepulchre empty, said unto the Apostles: He that is mighty hath destroyed corruption, and hath seized from their bonds those in Hades; proclaim ye with boldness that Christ God is risen, granting us great mercy" (Matins, Kathisma 3).

The hidden disciples of Christ, Joseph and Nicodemus, were shown to be the accomplices of the Myrrh-bearing women, who also demonstrated their devotion and manliness, "Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. 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" (John 19, 40-41)

Interpreting these Gospel words, Saints Theophylactos and Chrysostomos say: "They are not burying [Jesus] like a convict, but luxuriously", as "someone great and wonderful". Saint Cyril of Alexandria points out: the newness of the monument means the foreign and illusory way, so to speak, of

the return from death to life and innovation (=renewal), which Christ designed to deal with decay. Our death becomes new in Christ's death, transforming into a kind of sleep, with similar power and (physical) function. As far as we live in the future, now we are alive in God, according to the scriptures (Cf. Rom. 14, 8). This is why the blessed Paul everywhere refers to those who have died as "sleeping" (Cf. 1 Cor. 15, 20/15, 51).

According to Saint Gregory the Palamas, the resurrection of the Lord is a renewal of human nature, it is a revival and regeneration and a return to the immortal life of the first Adam, who was swallowed up by death because of sin and through death returned to the earth from which he was made.

Both the Myrrh-bearing women and the hidden disciples of Jesus did not understand the great and unique and unrepeatable event of the Resurrection of Christ, the transition, albeit of our human nature, from the depths of Hades to the all-light and divine and heavenly height. "They didn't even recognize that most blessed Saturday, which marked our transition from the depths of Hades to the full of light divine heavenly height", Saint Gregory Palamas says.

This is why the Church of Christ especially honours the memory of the holy Myrrh-bearers as well as of the hidden Disciples of Christ. Because all those people, who participated in the burial of Jesus Christ who died on the Cross, testified in their simplicity, as St. John the Theologian says, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life", (1 John 1, 1).

And we, my beloved brothers, who confess and expect the Resurrection of the dead, imitating the Holy Myrrh-bearing women and the hidden disciples, let us say: "Let us arise in the deep dawn and instead of myrrh, offer praise to the Master; and we shall see Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, Who

causeth life to dawn for all" (Katavasias of Pascha, Ode 5)".

After the dismissal, a litany took place, three times around the Holy Church, followed by a reception at the Hall, in which the Hegoumen Archimandrite Nifon addressed those present, analyzing the activity of the parish and thanking His Beatitude for His support. The male and female students of the Catechetical School under the guidance of their teacher Mrs Virginia sang the Paschal hymns in Greek and Arabic.

At noon, a meal was offered, with the Ambassador Mr Loukakis, the Mayor of the city, the President of the Community Council, the Commissioners, and many people present. His Beatitude addressed them again with the following address:

"In Thy Cross, Thou didst abolish the curse of the tree; by Thy burial, Thou hast slain the dominion of death; and by Thine arising, Thou hast enlightened the race of man. Wherefore, we cry out to Thee; O Benefactor, Christ our God, glory be to Thee" (Great Vespers, Anatolian Stichera 2), the hymnographer of the Church proclaims.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Dear President and honourable members of the Community Committee,

This holy day of the great and holy Easter, the Resurrection of Christ, constitutes the foundation and the crown of our saving faith, as Saint Paul clearly says: "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain" (1 Cor. 15,14,17).

The Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, that is, the holy Church of Jerusalem, to which the Lord entrusted the good legacy, the Apostolic declaration of tradition and faith, preserves it through the centuries intact and sanctified from one person to another, through the Holy Spirit that dwells in

it, on the other hand, through its holy persons, as today's honoured Joseph and Nicodemus, the hidden disciples of Christ in your ancient biblical town of Arimathea.

We say this because the little flock (Luke 12:32) of Arimathea / Ramle, continues to keep the flame of the Christian faith burning, but also of the eternal light of the Resurrection of God and our Saviour Christ. "For God is light, and in him there is no darkness... he who loves his brother abides in the light, but he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and he has nowhere to go" (1 John 1,5-2,11).

We also celebrate this unattainable light of Christ's love on the holy day of Easter. This is precisely the mission of the Church and the Church of Jerusalem, in the world and our war-tested region.

The Resurrection of Christ, my beloved brothers, is true and life-giving. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is "the one who regenerated us to hope of life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1,3) the Apostle Peter preaches.

We, clergy and people, lived this experience of rebirth in hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we live as guardians and ministers of the Life-giving Tomb of our Savior Christ, but also faithful shepherds of our Christian flock, of the acknowledged people of Christ. Christ is Risen!"

The celebration ended with refreshments being offered at the Rectory by the Hegoumen Archimandrite Nifon and Nun Fevronia.

**B'. In the chapel of the Myrrh-bearers next to the Cathedral of Saint James the Brother of God in Jerusalem.**

In this chapel, adjacent to the Holy Church of Saint James the Brother of God, a Divine Liturgy was celebrated, presided over by His Eminence, Archbishop Theophanes of Gerrash, and

concelebrated by Archimandrite Philoumenos, the ministering Priest of the Cathedral, Fr George Baramki and Hierodeacon Simeon, under the chanting of Fr Ioannis Antoniou and the students of the Patriarchal School of Zion in Greek and the choir of the Cathedral under Mr Rimon Kamar in Arabic.

After the Divine Liturgy, the Archpriest, the Priests, and the people went to the assembly centre of the parish "Ounjout-Hypostasis".

The President of the Trustees, Mr Ibrahim Salfiti, then spoke, analyzing the activity of the parish of the Cathedral of Saint James in general, and the representative of the "Myrrh-bearing Women", Mrs Arlet, about the activity of the "Myrrh-bearing Women" Organization.

**From Secretariat-General**