

# THE EPITAPH SERVICE AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Holy Friday evening, April 13/26, 2019, the Epitaph Service was held at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

The Service began with the procession of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood from the Patriarchate, under the lead of His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos.

When the procession reached the Church, the Service began with the Canon of Holy Saturday Matins, while the Priests were praying to receive the blessing and wear their liturgical festal mourning vestments, along with His Beatitude and the Archbishops.

At the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> Ode of the Canon the contrite Epitaph litany began from the Holy Altar of the Catholicon, with His Beatitude, the Archbishops and the Priests dressed in their liturgical vestments. When they reached the Sacred Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre they turned right towards the shrine "Touch me not" of the Franciscans, where a prayer was read, then they moved on to the chapel of the Seven bridges, of the Stocks, which has recently been renovated by the Patriarchate, of Logginus the Centurion, of the "They torn my garments", of the Finding of the Cross, of the Crown of Thorns and of Adam.

When these stops and the prayers read at them were concluded, the procession went up to the Horrendous Golgotha.

There, His Beatitude read the Gospel narrative of the Crucifixion, which was followed by a prayer and the veneration by His Beatitude, the Archbishops, and the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos.

Afterward, four Archbishops took upon their shoulders the silk corporal of the adorned with golden thread Epitaph from the

Holy Altar of Golgotha, which is above the hole-base of the Sacred Cross of Christ, and coming down the stairs with all the entourage, they placed it on the Deposition slate, and His Beatitude read before it the Gospel narrative of the Deposition.

A litany of the silk corporal three times around the Sacred Edicule followed, and then it was placed by the Archbishops on the slate of the Holy Sepulchre.

Having completed all the above, the three parts of the Lamentations of Holy Friday began by His Beatitude and the Archbishops. The 1<sup>st</sup> part started with His Beatitude, then the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> by the Archbishops from inside the All-holy Tomb, and then the troparia of the Lamentations were sung by the Archbishops, the Priests and the Byzantine Choirs, before the Sacred Edicule and from the platforms opposite it.

At the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> part the Sermon of the day was read by Geronda Secretary-General Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, as per below;

*“For the preaching of the cross*

*is to them that perish foolishness;*

*but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18)*

*Your Beatitude Father and Master,*

*Reverend chorea of Hierarchs,*

*Your Excellency Consul General of Greece,*

*Noble Priesthood,*

*Noble pilgrims,*

*Today, as the day of Holy and Great Friday is setting and the*

day of the Holy and Great Saturday is about to dawn, the Church commemorates the Cross of Jesus of Nazareth, Christ the Son of God, and at the same time it commemorates His burial. On the Cross, Jesus "having finished the mission that the Father appointed Him to do" (John 17:4), by saying "it is accomplished" (John 19:30), He gave up the ghost as human, on Friday evening, and just before the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, He was buried. The task of His burial was undertaken by His secret disciple, Joseph of Arimathea. Having received the permission by Pilate, he removed Jesus' body from the Cross and buried it at the empty tomb, which was carved in a stone by him, near the crucifixion place, where we are blessed to officiate this contrite Epitaph Service.

And while the Church commemorates a sad event, an event of death and especially a painful and humiliating death on the cross, with which the nature also was co-suffering and "was altered in pain", and an event of a burial of "a divine in human body", the Church does not lament, it does not mourn, on the contrary, it celebrates in contrition and modesty. It celebrates in joyful mourning. It celebrates its victory against death, through the death and burial of its Founder. It celebrates the mystery that is made familiar and understood through faith, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Incarnate Son of God. He is the One, Who took upon Himself the human nature, the whole of humanity. He is the One, in Whom according to St. Paul "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9) and in His Divine-human hypostasis, He descended to Hades through the Cross, then received again His glory and brought man in it along with Him. He appeared to those in Hades calling unto them, "enter again into Paradise". Those who were bound in Hades in punishment did He make again citizens of Paradise. For the remission of the human sins, Christ willingly offered Himself a living sacrifice, immaculate before God, a sacrifice of blood (Hebrews 9:14). Through His divine blood that was shed on the Cross, he redeemed us from the curse, from the bondage of the letter of the Law. Being

lifted up willingly on the Cross, He established with the blood of His pierced side His homonymous state, the Christian Church. This he adorned with His own blood (Acts 20:28). And in His salvific Providence, the once and for all sacrifice of His blood for the life and salvation of the world is being continued, as it is being offered now, a daily bloodless sacrifice in the Church and in the Holy Eucharist. In it, as it will be said in the Cherubim hymn of the evening Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great today, "the king of kings and the Lord of lords brings himself forth to be sacrificed and offered as food to the faithful".

In the blood of His Cross, Christ united the two opposing worlds, the Judaic and the Greek, in one. He called the Jews who "were looking for a sign" and considered the cross to be "a scandal" and the Greeks "who sought wisdom" and considered the cross to be "foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:18-24), not to be "dismissed" but to join the ones "called unto salvation" considering the cross "the power of God that leads to salvation" and believing that "he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross" (Ephes. 2:14-16).

Our Greek Nation is joined by its own free will in this one body, the body of Christ, the Church, "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). Our nation has kept the sciences it discovered and all the nations have assimilated them thereafter, on every aspect of life, but it abandoned its Metaphysic beliefs on the Twelve gods and "took upon itself the name of God" of Jesus of Nazareth Who was crucified. It accepted the preaching of the Apostle of Nations and in the Greek Democratic cities that used to be without peace and full of enmities, it created

oases of cultivation of noble peaceful morals, of sanctification and of salvation. It created Churches, which are all over the Greek territory, in Cyprus, in Philippi, in Thessalonica, in Corinth, in Ephesus, in Crete. It throve in the architecture of marvellous Churches, in iconography, in hymn writing, in the Theology of the Ecumenical Synods. It lifted up Christ's Cross as a banner of power and joy on the frequent fights against barbaric nations and in its victories, but also as a shield of patience through harsh times and calamities it underwent by its conquerors.

Moreover, in the places of the incarnate presence of our Crucified Redeemer, Christ our God, the Roman Orthodox nation has been magnified. Firstly at this Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the first official Church of Christianity, of the Emperor who is known with the phrase "with this [the Cross] you win], whose "beauty can be compared with the decorum of the heavenly firmament" and then to the Church of Nea and to the Churches of the Monasteries of the citizens of the desert, the Saints; Euthymius, Savvas, and Theodosios, and of Sophronius Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Fathers who defended the doctrine of the one hypostasis and the two natures of Christ.

The witness of these Holy Fathers has been unceasingly exhibited by the Church of Jerusalem the Mother of Churches, which fights along with its Hagiotaphite Brotherhood and in this Sacred Edicule which is "a possession and offering to Christ of the Orthodox Romans in 1810" as its architect Kalfa Komnenos from Mytilene inscribed on it. Having been renovated two years ago, this Edicule protects and decorates the joy-and-life-giving Tomb, in which the Lord who was crucified in the flesh, was buried, still in the flesh, by the grace and power of Which, the Head of the Church of Jerusalem and Officiator of this Epitaph Service, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos, and the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre with Him, wish to all of you, the noble pilgrims, "Happy

*Resurrection”.*

The Service continued with the Eulogitaria, the Praises, and the Great Doxology before the Holy Sepulchre and the finishing of the Service was done inside the Catholicon, with the placement of the silk corporal on the Holy Altar. Then there were the readings of the prophesy, the Apolytikion and the Gospel narrative, the morning prayer and the Dismissal. At the end of all these, the Patriarchal Entourage returned to the Central Monastery, while the bells were tolling in a mourning tone.

**From Secretariat-General**

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## **THE DEPOSITION VESPERS AT THE PATRIARCHATE**

On Holy Friday afternoon, April 13/26, 2019, the Vespers of Holy Friday, or as it is also called, the Deposition Service, took place at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

After the veneration at the Horrendous Golgotha, Vespers was held at the Catholicon, led by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch

of Jerusalem Theophilos, with the participation in prayer of the Archbishops in the Holy Altar, and the co-celebration of the Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and Priests from other Churches, at the chanting of the Choir Leader of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Mr. Constantinos Spyropoulos and his helpers. The service was attended by a large crowd of pious pilgrims in contrition under the chanting of the doxasticon of the Vespers.

**From Secretariat-General**

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## **THE ROYAL HOURS OF HOLY FRIDAY AT THE PATRIARCHATE**

On Holy Friday morning, April 13/26, 2019, which the is the primary day of the salvific Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ for our sake, the Royal Hours of the day were read at Praetorion, the place that served as the Lord's prison and condemnation.

Immediately after the reading of the Royal Hours, the Procession of the faithful through Via Dolorosa towards Golgotha began, led by the Most Reverend Archbishop Demetrios of Lydda, who carried the Cross on his shoulders, followed by thousands of faithful who sang "Thou hast redeemed us from the curse of the law with thine precious blood" and "Thy Cross we venerated of Master".

During the contrite procession there was a stopover at the chapel of Simon of Cyrene, who carried the Lord's Cross at the soldiers' command. The final stop of the procession was at the courtyard of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the ascent to the Horrendous Golgotha followed, where the Royal Hours

were read again. This happened after the Dragouman Reverend Archimandrite Mattheos and the Master of Ceremonies Archimandrite Bartholomew with other Hagiotaphite Fathers came down to the Church earlier in the morning for the opening of the main Gate of the Church by the Orthodox faithful, according to the Status Quo.

**From Secretariat-General**

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## **THE SERVICE OF THE PASSION AT THE PATRIARCHATE**

On Holy Thursday evening, April 12/25, 2019, the Service of the Passion was held at the Catholicon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

On this Service, according to the Typikon order of the Church, the Twelve Gospel narratives were read, the first by our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos and the rest by Archbishops and Priests, under the chanting of the Choir Leader of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Mr. Constantinos Spyropoulos and his helpers, while the service was attended by a large crowd of pilgrims.

**From Secretariat-General**

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# THE SERVICE OF THE SACRED WASHING OF THE FEET AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Holy Thursday morning, April 12/25, 2019, the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great was celebrated at the Holy Cathedral of St. James the Brother of God, led by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Most Reverend Archbishop Theodosios of Sebastia and the Assistant Bishop Timotheos of the Patriarchate of Romania, Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios as the first in the rank of the Priests, Archimandrite Meletios, and the Priest of the Cathedral Fr. Charalambos Bandour. The chanting was delivered by the Choir Leader of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Mr. Constantinos Spyropoulos in Greek and the Choir of the Cathedral in Arabic, while the service was attended by the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos and members of the Greek Consulate, and a large congregation.

Immediately after the dismissal of the Divine Liturgy, bells tolling, the Service of the Sacred washing of the feet began at the Holy Courtyard of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, on an elevated platform, according to the Typikon order of the Church of Jerusalem.

During the service, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos washed the feet of twelve Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and Priests in commemoration of the event that the Lord during the Last Supper before His Passion, washed the feet of His Disciples, leaving them an example of humility.

At the end of the service the entourage returned to the Patriarchate Headquarters.

**From Secretariat-General**

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# **THE SACRAMENT OF THE HOLY UNCTION AT THE PATRIARCHATE**

On Holy Wednesday evening, April 11/24, 2019, the Sacrament of the Holy Unction was held at the Monastic Church of Saints Constantine and Helen, as a spiritual preparation and sanctification for the Holy Communion of Holy Thursday, and the remaining days of the Holy Week. The Service was officiated by our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos with Archbishops as His co-celebrants.

At the end of the Sacrament His Beatitude and the Archbishops anointed each other and then they anointed the great crowd of the faithful who attended the service.

**From Secretariat-General**

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# **THE FIRST SERVICE OF THE BRIDEGROOM AT THE**

# **PATRIARCHATE**

On Palm Sunday evening, April 8/21, 2019, the first Service of the Bridegroom of the Holy Week took place at the Catholicon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, led by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, Who welcomed the noble pilgrims to the Holy Land with His spiritual words.

The Service of the Bridegroom will also be held on Holy Monday and Holy Tuesday evenings at the Catholicon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, at the Monastic Church of Saints Constantine and Helen and to other Churches of the Patriarchate.

On the mornings of Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday and Holy Wednesday the Divine Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified gifts will be held at the Horrendous Golgotha and at the Monastic Church of Saints Constantine and Helen.

**From Secretariat-General**

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## **THE FEAST OF PALM SUNDAY AT THE PATRIARCHATE**

On Palm Sunday, April 8/21, 2019, the Patriarchate celebrated the commemoration of the triumphant entry of the Lord in Jerusalem, a little while before His Passion, when the children of the Jews welcomed Him holding palm tree branches and crying out loud "Hosanna to the son of David".

## 1. Great Vespers

This event was celebrated in the evening at the Catholicon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with Great Vespers, led by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, under the chanting of the Choir Leader of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Mr. Constantinos Spyropoulos. The service was attended by the newly arrived groups of pilgrims from various Orthodox countries.

## 2. The Palm Tree Branches Procession

On Saturday evening, April 7/20, 2019, Lazarus's Saturday, immediately after the Service of Vespers at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, many faithful rushed to the South side of the Mount of Olives which overlooks Bethany and is named Bet-Faghi.

His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem also arrived there, escorted by Secretary-General Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Most Reverend Archbishop Theodosios of Sebastia, the Dragouman Archimandrite Mattheos and the Master of Ceremonies Archimandrite Bartholomew.

He blessed the palm tree branches by reading the relevant prayer and designated the Most Reverend Archbishop Theodosios of Sebastia to lead the procession in commemoration of the triumphant entry of the Lord in Jerusalem, when the children of the Jews welcomed Him by placing their garments on the streets and crying out loud "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

The procession with the large participation of local faithful and pilgrims who were singing the apolytikion of Lazarus came down the Mount of Olives, passed through the valley of Gethsemane, where the Tomb of Theotokos lies, and concluded at the Holy Monastery of God's Ancestors, Joachim and Anna, by the Lions' Gate or St. Stephen's Gate.

### 3. Patriarchal Divine Liturgy

The festivities continued with the celebration of this event on the morning of the feast day at the Catholicon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, led by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos with co-celebrants the Most Reverend Archbishops of the Throne, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, the Most Reverend Archbishops; Theophanes of Gerassa, Aristarchos of Constantina, Theodosios of Sebastia, Demetrios of Lydda, and the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, the visiting Most Reverend Metropolitan George of Diveyevo and other Bishops from the Patriarchate of Russia, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and visiting Priests from other Orthodox Churches, under the chanting of the Choir Leader of the Church of the Resurrection Mr. Constantinos Spyropoulos. The Service was attended by the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos and a large congregation that filled the Catholicon.

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a litany, three times around the Holy Sepulchre and around the shrines, while the people held palm tree branches, then the Gospel narrative was read before the Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre.

After the litany there was the return at the Patriarchate Headquarters in procession, and all people were holding palm tree branches in their hands.

**From Secretariat-General**

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# LAZARUS SATURDAY AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Saturday, April 7/20, 2019, the Patriarchate celebrated the feast of Lazarus' Saturday, as the commemoration of the event of the resurrection from the dead of the four-day dead Lazarus, friend of our Lord. This event was celebrated:

1. In Bethany, where the event took place.

At the Holy Monastery of Lazarus' sisters, Martha and Mary, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos officiated the Divine Liturgy with co-celebrants the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Most Reverend Archbishop Philoumenos of Pella, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, with first in rank Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios and Priests from other Churches, under the chanting of Archimandrite Demetrios and Byzantine choir singers from the Church of Cyprus. The service was attended by the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos and members of the Greek Consulate, as well as a large congregation of pilgrims.

His Beatitude preached the Divine Word to this congregation as follows;

"O Lord, Thy voice destroyed the dominion of hell and the world of Thy power raised from the tomb with him that had been four days dead; and Lazarus became the first-fruits of the regeneration of the world. All things are possible to Thee, O Lord and King of all. Bestow upon Thy servants cleansing and great mercy".

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims

Having concluded the beneficial to the soul Great Lent, we

came today to this holy place, the town of Bethany, the hometown of Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary, in order to proclaim in Eucharist and Doxology, on the one hand the Common Resurrection before the Passion of our Lord and Saviour Christ, which was confirmed by the resurrection from the dead of His friend, the righteous Lazarus, and on the other hand, the triumphant entry of Christ in Jerusalem.

Lazarus' resurrection in Bethany, as well as the triumphant entry of our Saviour Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, are two important events of the great mystery of the Divine Providence, which are steadfastly bound together, as the hymn writer says; "Giving us before Thy Passion an assurance of the general resurrection, Thou hast raised Lazarus from the dead, O Christ our God. Therefore, like the children, we also carry tokens of victory, and cry to Thee, the Conqueror of death: Hosanna in the highest; blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord".

"Christ performed this wondrous event of Lazarus' resurrection as a foretelling of the resurrection from the dead of the whole humankind" according to St. Cyril of Alexandria, which will take place during the Second Coming of Christ. Moreover, Lazarus' resurrection took place so that the Son of God would be glorified, as St. John the Evangelist says; "When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness [of Lazarus] is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby" (John 11:4).

Interpreting these words, Amonios says: "For it was not so much for glory and wonder to raise Lazarus from his sickness, as it was to raise him from the dead". In other words, Christ's Resurrection is the peak of the life in Christ, namely of the believers in Crucified and Resurrected Christ as St. Paul preaches; "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. 15:14).

Christ's resurrection, my dear brothers and sisters, refers

primarily and mainly to the human nature of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ. This means that we are called to be co-resurrected in Christ with Christ. "Jesus said, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). And in more detail, I am the resurrection and the life. I have the power to resurrect because I am the source of life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies in the flesh, yet he will live, because, despite the heavenly and spiritual life I will transmit to his soul from this time forth, in due course, he will also be risen from the dead by me, even in the flesh.

Because Lazarus' resurrection is the preamble of the common resurrection of all people, for this reason Christ rose Lazarus from the dead after four days of his death, in order to show with this manner the common resurrection from the four elements that constitute the human body, namely, the earth, the soil, the air, the water and the fire, according to St. Cyril of Alexandria who interprets the words of Martha, Lazarus' sister; " Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days" (John 11:39).

In other words the natural death denotes undeniably the corruption that the created bodily form of man undergoes, in contrast to the death in Christ, which is the death of incorruption, namely the death of deliverance from the death of the bondage, namely of the corruption of sin. The death of deliverance is the death of eternal life and beatitude. "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:26) the Lord says.

Commenting on the above words of the Lord, St. Cyril of Alexandria says: "The one that believes in Him (Christ) has eternal life in the time to come, in beatitude and complete incorruption".

St. John the Evangelist says "then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, which had been



dead, whom he raised from the dead" (John 12:1). "On the next day, much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him and cried, Hosanna: blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord" (John 12: 12-13).

Those people did this, becoming eye witnesses of the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection from the dead, as St. Cyril of Alexandria says: "being more adept to believing the large crowds welcomed Christ praising Him with palm tree branches as the one who conquered death".

This very Christ who conquered death are we also called to welcome, my dear brothers and sisters, with the spiritual palm tree branches of faith and repentance, if we actually want to become communicants and partakers of the deliverance from the corruption of sin.

And along with the hymn writer of the Church let us say: "Before Thine own death, O Christ, Thou hast raised from hell Lazarus that was four days dead, and hast shaken the dominion of death. Through this one man whom Thou hast loved, Thou hast foretold the deliverance of all men from corruption. We therefore worship Thine almighty power and cry: Blessed art Thou, O Saviour, have mercy upon us".

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a procession to Lazarus' Tomb, led by the Most Reverend Archbishop Philoumenos of Pella, who read at the Tomb the Gospel narrative of Lazarus' Resurrection according to St. John.

Afterward there was a visit of the Episcopal Entourage at the Municipality of Bethany and lunch offered by the Abbess of the Monastery of Bethany, Nun Eupraxia.

## 2. At the Mount of Olives

Likewise the event of Lazarus' resurrection was celebrated on the Mount of Olives, due to its proximity to Bethany. In the evening there was Vespers at the Shrine of the Lord's Ascension with the Service of Compline and a procession towards the Church of the Men of Galilee (Galili Viri), officiated by the Most Reverend Archbishop Theodosios of Sebastia, where the morning Gospel was read, at the presence of His Beatitude. Finally there procession returned to the Ascension Shrine.

In the morning the Divine Liturgy was officiated by the Most Reverend Archbishop Theodosios of Sebastia, under the chanting of the Choir Leader of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Mr. Constantinos Spyropoulos and the choir of St. James Cathedral, at the presence of local Christians and pilgrims.

**From Secretariat-General**

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## **HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM CELEBRATES THE D. LITURGY AT SARANTARION MOUNT**

On Sunday April 1/14, 2019, 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Great Lent, and day of the commemoration of our Righteous Mother Mary of Egypt, His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos officiated

the Divine Liturgy at the Holy Church of the Annunciation in Sarantaron Mount. His Beatitude's entourage were the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Hegoumen of the H. Monastery of St. John the Baptist by the River Jordan Archimandrite Bartholomew, the Hegoumen of the H. Monastery of St. Gerasimos of the Jordan Archimandrite Chrysostom, the Choir singer Archimandrite Demetrios, Archdeacon Mark and Deacon Sophrony, while He was welcomed by Archimandrite Gerasimos, who is the Hegoumen and renovator of this Monastery and of the renovator of the Monastery of St. John the Baptist by the River Jordan.

Before the Holy Communion, His Beatitude addressed all present with the following Sermon;

"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:13-14) Paul, the great Apostle of the nations, preaches.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians

The grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us in this Holy place, on the high mountain where our Lord Jesus Christ fasted for forty days and was tempted by the devil, in order to worship the Living God on the one hand, and to partake of the Holy and sacred mysteries of the precious body and life-giving blood of our God and Saviour Christ.

Today, the fifth Sunday of the Great Lent, our Holy Church commemorates our Righteous Mother Mary of Egypt, who having lived in an indecent manner for seventeen years, she then decided to change her life and turn to God in repentance. For

this reason she retreated to the deepest desert of the Jordan river, where she led a very harsh life for forty years, surpassing her human nature, in unceasing prayer and having Christ as an example “who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, [and] purge[s] our conscience from dead works” (Hebrews 9:14).

And according to St. Paul, it is the blood of Christ that can purge our conscience from dead works, meaning the works of sin, which infect consciousness and cause necrosis to the humans.

In other words, the purging of our consciousness is accomplished with the working of Christ’s blood in us, without which [the blood] the worship of the Living God is impossible. Theophylaktos says; “the one who is manifesting dead works does not worship the True Living God, but [worships] the works, and deifies them. In that manner the man who loves food deifies his stomach, and similarly the greedy man commits idolatry”. And St. Chrysostom says; “the one who does dead works does not serve the Living God”. And this is so because the sin darkens the mind, infects the consciousness and alienates man from God. Only when our soul is pure and our consciousness cleansed from sin can we worship the true God and our Lord in a manner pleasing to Him, as St. Paul says: “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28).

Through the redeeming blood of the cross our Lord Jesus Christ banished the death of sin and granted us the possibility of salvation eternally, namely the deliverance from the bondage of sin. Therefore St. Paul advices us; “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1).

Being the mystical body and the head of His Church, our Lord Jesus Christ gave His disciples and Apostles power by saying;

“Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose so ever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose so ever sins ye retain, they are retained (John 20:22-23). Moreover, the Church is considered to be the representation of Noah’s ark, “wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” as St. Peter says (1 Peter 3:20-21).

In other words, the salvation through Noah’s ark, prefigured the salvation through the font and the baptism. And baptism is not only the cleansing of the flesh from impurity, but also a fervent supplication to God, that He may give us a clean consciousness, free from any compunction. And the baptism saves us by the power of the resurrection of Christ.

Baptism, my dear brothers and sisters, is no other than the fundamental mystery of repentance, according to the Lord’s preaching; “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matt. 9:13). And the Christians in Jerusalem glorified God while listening to St. Peter’s preaching who said: “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). St. Paul also urges his disciple Timothy by saying; “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

Also prophet Ezekiel says that God is a God of mercy, and every sinner can be saved if he repents. “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11).

Invoking this very kindness and philanthropy and the infinite mercy of God, St. Paul says; "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3:5-6). And the "washing of regeneration" is the mystery of repentance through which man washes his soul and cleanses his consciousness. St. John the Evangelist says, "But if we walk in the light [of God] the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Of this washing of regeneration, namely of the mystery of repentance but also of the precious blood of Christ, did Saint Mary of Egypt partake, a Saint who through her harsh striving and of course through the power of the Precious Cross, washed away the crimes of sin and granted to us the fruits of repentance; therefore, we entreat her along with the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary to have pity on us and deliver us from every impurity of our passions. Amen.

Many Happy returns and a blessed Easter!"

During this visit the expert scientists from the University of Athens and the University of Thessalonica began the first stage of their project for the fixation of the rock of Sarantaron Mount and of the Church within it.

**From Secretariat-General**