

THE FEAST OF SUNDAY OF THE MYRRH-BEARING WOMEN IN ANCIENT ARIMATHAEA (REMLI)

The event of the Deposition of the Lord from the Cross and His burial by Joseph the honourable counselor, who asked to receive His body from Pilate (Mark 15:43-46) was celebrated by the Patriarchate in Remli – ancient Arimathaea – on Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women, April 9/22, 2018.

The commemoration of this feast was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants the Most Reverend Archbishops Damascene of Joppa, Aristarchos of Constantina and the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, such as Archimandrites Kallistos and Makarios, Priests from the neighbouring to Remli areas, Archdeacon Mark and Deacon Anastasios. The hymns were delivered by the Remli Community Choir and the Service was attended by representatives of the Greek Embassy in Tel-Aviv and a large Orthodox Congregation.

His Beatitude delivered a Sermon to this Congregation as follows below;

“Let the nations and peoples praise Christ our God, Who willingly endured the Cross for us and was in Hades for three days. And let them worship His Resurrection from the dead, whereby all the ends of the world were enlightened”. The hymn writer of the Church proclaims.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Reverend Christians

Your ancient and hagiographic town of Arimathaea is rejoicing gleefully in its participation in the Passion on the Cross and

the glorious Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, through the secret but faithful disciples, Joseph and Nicodemus, who also became preachers of Christ's three-day burial and rising from the dead.

This is shown clearly by today's festal and Paschal day of the Lord, in which we honour the commemoration of the Holy Myrrh-bearing Women and of Christ's faithful disciples, Joseph and Nicodemus, who became truthful witnesses of His burial and Resurrection, as referenced by Mark the Evangelist: "Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counselor, which also waited for the Kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus...And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre" (Mark 15:43.46).

Joseph of Arimathaea, the honourable counselor, is distinguished for two things; firstly, he was expecting the Kingdom of God, of our Lord Jesus Christ; secondly, "he laid him [the crucified Christ] in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock", and that sepulchre was his own one. Nicodemus was a co-confessor to this event, "who at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight" (John 19:39).

Both Joseph and Nicodemus recognized in Jesus the Son of God preaching the Kingdom of Heaven, as St. John the Evangelist witnesses; "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:5-6). In more detail, "I verily tell you Nicodemus, Jesus said, that unless a man is not born spiritually by the Holy Baptism and the Holy Spirit, Who works the regeneration of man invisibly, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Every single living being who has been born naturally of the flesh

is also flesh, it cannot enter this spiritual Kingdom. And the one who has been born of the Holy Spirit, is a spiritual being and personality, and he will enjoy the spiritual Kingdom of God".

In other words, my dear brothers, "His Resurrection from the dead, whereby all the ends of the world were enlightened" according to the hymn writer, is nothing but the Kingdom of God, in which every single man is called to enter. Christ's resurrection declares the victory of Christ's death over the death of corruption and sin, as His Church proclaims; "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and to those in the grave He hath given life". And "Pascha the Lord's Pascha; for Christ God hath brought us from death unto life and from earth unto heaven"; And moreover; "O great and most sacred Pascha, Christ; O Wisdom and Word and Power of God! **Grant that we partake of Thee fully in the unwaning day of Thy Kingdom**".

And the unwaning day of God's Kingdom is man's salvation, in other words, his participation in the resurrection of Christ's deceased human nature. Christ is the One, Who in His resurrection exalted and deified our human nature along with Him, as the hymn writer says; "When thy Son destroyed all the might of death, O Virgin, as the mighty God He exalted and deified us with Himself by His Resurrection. Wherefore, we sing His praise unto the ages".

This reality of the fact that He "exalted and deified us with Himself by His Resurrection", do we Christians live and realize inside the Church, which is the mystical body of Christ in the world. And we say this, because the Kingdom of God, which Christ revealed to the world, is not eating and drinking freely. It is righteousness and peace and unity with our brothers and fellow humans, and the joy granted by the Holy Spirit. St. Paul preaches; "For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the

Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men" (Romans 14:17-18). And elsewhere St. Paul again says; "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption" (1 Cor. 15:50).

Interpreting St. Paul's words, Cyril of Alexandria says; "as long as the human body is flesh and blood, in other words, mortal and corruptible, it cannot inherit the Kingdom of God". This means two things; firstly that by our participation in the sacramental and liturgical or Eucharistic life of the Church, we, its faithful members, are able to foretaste spiritually the Kingdom of heaven; and secondly, we are able to embrace incorruption, as evidenced by the myriads of holy men and women and especially by the sustained relics of the Saints of our Church. As the hymn writer says, "Having suffered for Christ unto death, O prizewinning Martyrs, ye have your souls in the Heavens in the hand of God, and your relics are escorted throughout the whole world."

Christ's Resurrection, my beloved ones, is the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. To this cause we are called today, by the Holy Myrrh-bearing women and Saints Joseph and Nicodemus, through the intercessions of our All-Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, saying along with the hymn writer; "renew O my soul all thy senses towards the divine vision; for Christ wants to perform the inauguration of renewal in this manner".

Christ is risen!

After the Divine Liturgy there was a Litany around the Church, and the inauguration of the refurbished reception hall, where His Beatitude addressed the congregation as follows;

"Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Mat. 5:14).

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Reverend members of the Community

Today, there is festal Paschal joy and gleefulness in the Holy Monastery of your town of Arimathaea, where you are working on a refurbishment project under our dearest Hegoumen Reverend Archimandrite Niphon and the donators who love the goodness of the House of the Lord, all the faithful and dear to Us members of this Community.

The venerable Jerusalem Patriarchate with the Order of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood has managed throughout the centuries to sustain the All-holy Shrines in the Holy Land and in the city of Jerusalem; it has also managed to guarantee the Christian presence therein.

And we say this, because the Christian presence and witness in the Holy Land and the surrounding region of the Middle East is a liturgical mission of worship on behalf of the Mother of Churches, for which it is written "and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Mat. 16:18).

The co-operation between the Patriarchate and your Community within the spirit of the Church and Christ's love, is owed to the educational, social and spiritual progress in the Community of Remla. "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?" (Mat. 5:13)

The peaceful co-habitation with our Hebrew and Muslim fellow citizens is an example to imitate. Congratulating you on all these good works, we wish that the Light of the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may enlighten your minds and hearts. To the members and the President of the New Community Committee we wish strength and success in their mission, reassuring them of Our undivided support.

Christ is risen!

At the end of all events there was a festal meal.

From Secretariat-General

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