

THE FEAST OF THE UNIVERSAL EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Wednesday, September 14/27, 2023, the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross was celebrated by the Patriarchate.

During this feast, the Church remembers that Saint Helen, sent to the Holy Land by her son Constantine the Great, saw on the Horrendous Golgotha the Tomb of the Lord and the Cross, on which he was attached for our salvation, and she built the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the decade 326-336 AD.

To the glory of our Crucified and Resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, Saint Helen performed the Inauguration of his surrounding Church on September 13, 336 AD in the presence of the Archbishop of Jerusalem Makarios. Then he raised the Cross of Christ, so that the assembled multitudes could look at it from afar, and they repeatedly called out "Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy".

This act has remained as a tradition since then in the Church, celebrated the day after the feast of the Inauguration, that is on September 14th.

In honour of this event, Great Vespers was held on Tuesday afternoon in the Catholicon of the Church of the Resurrection after incense and the blessing of bread presided over by our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos.

On the morning of the feast, Wednesday, September 14/27, 2023, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated at the Catholicon of the Church of the Resurrection, led by His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with the co-celebration of their Eminences, Metropolitans Isychios of Capitolias and

Panteleimon of Xanthi, two Bishops from the Patriarchate of Serbia, the Hegoumen of the Monastery Vlatadon, Reverend Bishop Nikiforos of Amorio, the Archbishops; Theophanes of Gerassa, Aristarchos of Constantina, Philoumenos of Pella, Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba, the Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios, Holy Sepulchre Hieromonks, priests from other Orthodox Churches, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacon Eulogios. The chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon and Mr Angelos Gianopoulos with the help of Byzantine singers from Greece. The service was attended by a large congregation and the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Demetrios Angelosopoulos.

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a litany which marched from the Catholicon to the Shrine of Deposition, went down the stairs to Saint Helen's chapel and after the incense offering at the Altar of the Armenians and the throne of Saint Helen, it went to the Cave of the finding of the Cross. The exaltation of the Cross followed there, held by our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos and the Holy Wood was exalted at the four parts of the horizon, under the chanting of the apolytikion of the feast. The Holy Cross was placed at the place of its finding and it was venerated by the High Priests and the Consul General.

The litany continued to the Holy Sepulchre, thrice around the Sacred Edicule as the Holy Wood was held on top of the heads of H.H.B. the High Priests and concluded at the Horrendous Golgotha. There the Cross was exalted again at the four parts of the horizon by His Beatitude, while the large crowd of people were chanting the apolytikion of the feast. The High Priests and the Consul General venerated again the Holy Cross there, holding basil branches in their hands, which they will keep as a blessing in their homes.

After the dismissal of the Liturgy, all the congregation venerated the Holy Wood which is kept in the case of King Justin.

At the end of the service, the Patriarchal entourage returned to the Patriarchate Reception Hall, along with a large crowd of faithful Christians to whom His Beatitude delivered the following address:

“Christ on the cross; let us come together as partakers of His sufferings, so that we may also be born of His glory. Christ in the dead, let us die to sin, that we may live in righteousness... Christ in hades; let us come together to the highest humility, that we may also meet and be exalted and be glorified, forever seeing God and be seen”, says Saint John of Damascus.

Beloved brothers in Christ,

Reverend Christians and pilgrims,

The power of the Holy and Life-giving Cross deemed us worthy to celebrate in this place of its finding under Saint Helen, but also in the place of the Crucifixion of our God and Saviour Christ in the Horrendous Golgotha, the so-called “Skull Place”, its Universal Exaltation.

The truly great mystery of the divine Providence, as well as of the Holy Cross, whose “word to those who are lost is a blessing, to those who are saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18), cannot be understood by human logic, but only through faith and the purity of the soul, as Saint John of Damascus says: “Great grace, admittedly, the mystery of the divine Providence will not be understood, it will be believed only by one who is free, of a pure mind, out of fear of God and with a desire to be given.”

The Cross is the sacrificial power of God, and this is because in the Cross and through the Cross the great mystery of man’s salvation was accomplished. It is written; “God our king, centuries ago, worked salvation in the midst of the earth” (Ps. 73,12). The Son of God, “Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God

for a sweetsmelling savour" (Eph. 5:2). Because of this, all who obey him "he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him"(Hebrews 5:9).

The Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is "the beauty of the Church", "the support of the faithful", and the "weapon against the devil". The Cross is the trophy of Christ, through which the demons flee. "The cross is a trophy for Christ; Once it was stood up, forever it is woe to the demons who are driven away", says Saint John of Damascus.

Saint Cosmas, bishop of Maiouma, extolling the sermon of today's great feast, of the exaltation of the Holy Cross, exclaims hymnologically: "O Theotokos, thou art a mystical paradise, which being untilled hath blossomed forth Christ, by Who the life-bringing Tree of the Cross was planted in the earth. In worshipping Him now through its exaltation, thee do we magnify" (Ode 9, Heirmos).

In other words, Jesus Christ, as perfect God, is the one who planted "the tree of life in Paradise" (Genesis 2:9). He Himself planted "the life-giving tree of the Cross on earth" from the pure blood of the Virgin and Theotokos Mary during His incarnation.

The life-giving tree is none other than the wood of the Cross, on which he was crucified and in which "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1, 7- 8). Through the cross, we worship "Christ our God, who was lifted up on the cross and sacrificed for our sins". Let us honour and magnify the most blessed Theotokos and Mother of God, who gave birth to our God, the Word and our Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory and the kingdom now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen. Many happy returns".

After this address, His Beatitude blessed all present. He awarded the honorary distinction of the Superior Brigade of

the Order of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre to the Hegoumen of the Holy Monastery of Vlatadon, His Eminence Bishop Nikiforos of Amori in recognition and appreciation of the accomplishments of the centre of this Monastery of outstanding theological and uniting work of the Churches and the provision of hospitality to students of the Patriarchate in it.

The multitudes of the faithful, receiving the Patriarchal blessing glorified to God for the salvation He provided to the world through the Cross of His Son.

From Secretariat-General