

LAZARUS SATURDAY IN BETHANY (2017)

On Saturday, 26th March/8th April 2017, the rising of Lazarus by our Lord Jesus Christ was celebrated by the Patriarchate in Bethany. On this feast, according to the narrative of John the Evangelist, the Church commemorates the following event; Lazarus from Bethany, which is nearby Jerusalem, was a friend of Christ, and having become seriously ill, he died. Having arrived at his tomb, the Lord in His divine-human power resurrected Lazarus who had already been dead for four days, confirming thus to both His disciples and us our common Resurrection.

In memory of this event, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated on the day of the feast in the Holy Nunnery named after Lazarus' sisters Martha and Mary, the place where the Lord began walking with Martha and Mary heading for the tomb.

The Divine Liturgy was led by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with concelebrants the Most Reverend Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Most Reverend Archbishop Demetrios of Lydda, visiting Reverend Metropolitans of the Russian Church George of Nizni Novgorod and Alexander of Chlemitski in Ukraine, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, among whom the Priest of the Holy Monastery Archimandrite Epiphanyos, and Hieromonks chanting, as well as the nuns of the Monastery amidst a fully crowded Church.

To this congregation His Beatitude preached the divine word as follows:

"O Christ, who art the Resurrection and the Life of man, standing by the tomb of Lazarus Thou hast confirmed our faith

in Thy two natures, O forebearing Lord, proving that Thou wast born from the pure Virgin as both God and man. For as man Thou hast asked 'Where is he buried?' and as God by Thy life-giving command Thou hast raised him from the dead on the fourth day" the hymn writer of the Church proclaims.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble pilgrims,

Great and paradox is the miracle worked today at this holy place where our Lord Jesus Christ stood and Lazarus' sisters Martha and Mary welcomed Him. This great miracle is the resurrection from the dead of the holy and righteous friend of Christ Lazarus, who had been dead for four days, and whose memory we festively celebrate. And this is so, because Lazarus became the salvific preamble of our rebirth, our general resurrection in Christ, 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 comes in the Name of the Lord".

Being with His disciples in Bethany, by the tomb of the buried Lazarus, whom He resurrected, even though he had been dead for four days, Christ proved that He is the resurrection and the life, as St. John the Evangelist witnesses: "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26).

Moreover, our Lord Jesus Christ proved that He is perfect God and perfect man. In other words, He certified His two hypostatic natures, the divine and the human. He certified His undertaking of the human flesh by the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit, which He deified, absolving it (the flesh) from the corruption of death, that is, the corruption of sin.

By Lazarus' resurrection, it became known that Christ was the Son of God and God; and that he was resurrected, and there will be resurrection of the dead. For this reason the hymn writer proclaims: "Christ the joy of all, the truth, the light, the life, the resurrection of the world, in His love appeared to those on earth; and He became Himself the pattern of our resurrection, granting divine forgiveness unto all".

It is precisely this joy of the resurrection, which our Lord Jesus Christ revealed to the world, that we foretaste today, with our presence in Bethany, the town of Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary. The hymn writer says, "Today Bethany proclaims beforehand the Resurrection of Christ the Giver of Life, and it rejoices at the rising of Lazarus". And Bethany also conveyed the message of the coming of the King of Glory in Jerusalem according to Prophet Zacharias who said: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zechariah 9:9).

Of course, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of our Saviour Jesus Christ is the One who encouraged the children of Jerusalem to cry aloud "Hosanna in the highest, Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord.

Let us therefore my beloved brothers, prepare ourselves, so that just like the innocent children we mystically praise him with palm trees and branches and proclaim: Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord, hosanna in the highest. And together with the Hymn writer let us say: "By the prayers of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, grant us worthy too, to witness Your Cross and Passion O Lord, and the glorious, and queen of the days, Resurrection of Your philanthropy" Amen. Happy Easter!"

The dismissal of the Divine Liturgy was followed by a procession to Lazarus' tomb, led by the Most Reverend Archbishop Demetrios of Lydda, where the gospel narrative

according to St. John the Evangelist on Lazarus' resurrection was read.

The Abbess of the Monastery Nun Eupraxia offered His Beatitude a reception and a meal to the Episcopal Entourage.

From Secretariat-General

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