

THOMAS' SUNDAY AT THE PATRIARCHATE

The Sunday 18 April / 1 May 2022 was celebrated by the Patriarchate as the second Sunday after Easter and Thomas' Sunday.

On this Sunday the Church commemorates that on the eighth day after His Resurrection, the Lord appeared to His Disciples in the upper room while the doors were closed when Thomas was also with them. The Lord urged Thomas to touch Him and when the latter did so, the Lord told him, "because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20, 24-31).

1. This event was celebrated in Cana of Galilee, along with the celebration of the miracle of the wedding in Cana, that is, the turning of water into wine and the blessing of the wedding. This is celebrated on Thomas' Sunday due to the gospel narrative about the wedding in Cana, which is read on the Monday after Thomas' Sunday.

The feast in Cana was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants their Eminences, Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios, Hagiotaphite Hierodeacons and Arab-speaking Priests from the Galilee district.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed on him" (John 2,11).

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims

The divine grace of the resurrected Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour, has gathered us all in this holy place of Cana in Galilee where Christ's feet stood, but also His mother's the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, so that we may boldly confess the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this, is because as Saint Paul preaches, "if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. 15,14).

Today and tomorrow's gospel narrative refer to the signs Jesus worked before His disciples, so that both they and we, may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and by believing in Him we may have eternal life in His name (John 20,31).

In today's gospel narrative according to the Evangelist John, we hear the Lord saying to Thomas: "because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20,29), while in the other gospel narrative we hear that "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him" (John 2,11).

Saint John of Damascus refers to the need and power of faith for the comprehension of the mystery of the divine providence by saying: "the wonders are made manifest unto those who worship the mystery in faith" (Thursday of renewal week, Matins, praises, Troparion 1).

"And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God" (John 20,26-28).

Interpreting these words, Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: "So

we reasonably do the gatherings on the eighth day and if we need to say the most secret ... although we close the doors, Christ comes and appears to all of us, both invisibly and visibly; invisibly as God, and visibly again in the body. He also allows them to give His holy flesh to hold. Because we approach by grace with the coming of God through a secret blessing, we accept Christ in our hands so that we too may believe that He truly resurrected Himself as a temple ... So we abandon infidelity as destructive and after we touch Christ, we find ourselves to be very faithful and to have absolute confidence in our mind."

In other words, my dear brethren, our participation in the sacrament of the mystical blessing, namely the communion of the sacred body and blood of our Saviour Christ, is the true confession and remembrance that the Lord died and was resurrected for us in order to save us.

"And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage" (John 2,1-2).

Commenting on Christ's presence at the wedding in Cana, Zigavinos says: "The One who established marriage by law came to honour the wedding and sanctify it by His presence". Saint Cyril of Alexandria references Saint Paul and says: "Being a friend of man, the Saviour honoured the wedding by His presence, as He is the joy and happiness of all so that He would distance the ancient curse of childbearing." This is because the one who is in union with Christ is a new creation. The ancient curse which the Law of Moses had created and the sin have passed away. Behold, everything has become new. "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5,17).

According to the witness of Saint John the Evangelist, speaking about Christ, Saint John the Baptist presents Him as

the bridegroom and says: "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom" (John 3,29). Interpreting this verse, Saint Cyril of Alexandria refers to the spiritual wedding between humanity and Christ, which is accomplished through the Holy Baptism. And according to Zigavinos, the bride is "the faithful people, namely the Church which is mystically attached to Christ through faith".

"In the manner of a sunray did Christ's glory shine", Saint Cyril of Alexandria says, when "He did the beginning of the miracles in Cana of Galilee, in front of His Mother and Disciples" (ref. John 2,1-11). Among the many other signs Jesus did before His Disciples, is the touching of His side by the Apostle Thomas; His side which was pierced with the military spear.

Through His resurrection, my dear brethren, Christ conquered the death of corruption and sin and also dissolved the hatred between God and the people and granted us His peace "which passeth all understanding" (Philip. 4,7). "For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us" (Eph. 2,14) according to Saint Paul.

Our Holy Church calls upon this peace of Christ, namely the peace of the Holy Spirit, in every place and time. The confused and turbulent world is in need of this peace of Christ like never before. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14,27). These are the words that our Lord and God Jesus Christ, Who is risen from the dead tells us. Amen. Christ is risen! Many happy returns, blessed and in peace!"

At noon the Hegoumen Archimandrite Chrysostom and the Ecclesiastical Council hosted a meal, where His Beatitude addressed all present as follows:

“This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118,24), the psalmist proclaims.

Reverend Holy Fathers and Brethren,

Respected members of Churchwardens,

Reverend Archimandrite Chrysostom,

Dear brothers and sisters

The Holy Church of Christ rejoices today and is glad, especially the local Church of your city of Cana in Galilee, on this festal and Paschal day.

We thank our Triune God for the blessing He bestowed upon us, to gather in this place after the trial of the deadly covid disease.

The Passion on the Cross, the three-day burial and the Resurrection of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ are the fulfilment of the Divine Providence.

The living presence of the Christians in the Holy Land and in this holy shrine is a soundproof that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16,18), as the Lord said.

The preaching of the gospel of Christ is the preaching of righteousness, love, peace and divine philanthropy. “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matt. 9,13) the Lord says. This is confirmed by Saint Paul’s words: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6,12).

Behold again, why Christ’s resurrection is the fulfilment of the mystery of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15, 26), Saint Paul preaches, calling upon the

prophet Isaiah, who says: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. 15,54-55 / Isaiah 25,8).

My dear brethren, who live and visit the city of Cana in Galilee, where our Lord Jesus Christ worked His first miracle and revealed His glory; We have come along with our honourable entourage from the place of the resurrected Christ, our Saviour, the Holy city of Jerusalem, to exclaim the victorious greeting against death, "Christ is risen"!

Needless to say, We consider Ourselves personally a citizen of Cana and a member of your blessed Christian Community. For this reason, we tell you through the mouth of wise Paul; "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5,17).

Christ is risen! Many happy returns, fruitful in Christ."

2. At the Church of the Holy Sepulchre

The feast was celebrated with Great Vespers on Saturday afternoon, with the veneration of the Deposition slate and the Holy Sepulchre, the incense offering, Great Entrance and the Blessing of Bread at the Catholicon, which was led by the Patriarchal Commissioner, His Eminence Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, along with Hagiotaphite Hieromonks. The chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon and the Typikon Keeper of the monastic Church of Saints Constantine and Helen Archimandrite Alexios, as the service was attended by many local faithful Christians and numerous pilgrims.

On Sunday morning the Divine Liturgy was held as a 'Small Parresia' at the Holy Sepulchre, officiated again by His Eminence Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, with the co-celebration of Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and Hierodeacons. The service was attended by local faithful Christians and numerous pilgrims and the chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon with the help of the Patriarchal School students.

After the feast, the Episcopal Entourage returned to the Patriarchate Headquarters.

There, the Patriarchal Commissioner wished the faithful Christians present, the light and the power of the Resurrected Christ.

From Secretariat-General