

HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS CELEBRATES THE DIVINE LITURGY IN THE TOWN OF REINE

On Sunday 10/23 May 2021, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos celebrated the Divine Liturgy for the feast of the Sunday of the Paralytic man at the Holy Church of Reine town, near the city of Nazareth.

On this Sunday the Church commemorates the Lord's healing of the man who suffered paralysis for thirty-eight years and had "no man, when the water is troubled, to put him into the sheep's pool" ... but with the Lord's word, he "took up his bed, and walked" (John 5:2-9).

For this festive event, having first visited the Metropolis of Nazareth, His Beatitude officiated the Divine Liturgy at the Holy Church of Reine Community, with the co-celebration of their Eminences, the Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias and Kyriakos of Nazareth, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, among whom the Hegoumen of the Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Lord in Tabor Archimandrite Hilarion, Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nektarios, Priest Nektarios and the Dean Priest of this Church Father Simeon. The chanting was delivered by the community Byzantine choir.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

"At the Sheep's Pool, a man lay in sickness; and when he saw Thee, O Lord, he cried: I have no man, that, when the water is troubled, he might put me therein. But when I go, another anticipateth me and receiveth the healing, and I lie yet in

mine infirmity. And straightaway, taking compassion on him, the Saviour saith unto him: For thee, I became man, for thee, I am clothed in flesh, and sayest thou: I have no man? Take up thy bed and walk. All things are possible for Thee, all things are subject to Thee. Remember us all and have mercy on us. O Holy One, since Thou art the Friend of man" (Vespers, Entreaty, Glory).

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians

The grace of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the One Who is the healer of the bodies and souls, our Lord Jesus Christ, has gathered us all in this holy place of your town, Reine, so that in Paschal joy, we may celebrate the miracle of the paralytic man's healing, who had been waiting for the healing of his infirmity for thirty-eight years.

The mystery of the Divine Providence in Christ had a sole purpose, the healing, meaning the salvation of the souls and the bodies of us men, from the infirmity, which is the sin, as the hymnographer clearly expresses: "For thee, I became man, for thee, I am clothed in flesh, and sayest thou: I have no man?" the Lord says.

In today's Gospel narrative of the healing of the paralytic man we distinguish and marvel at the power of patience and hope. The thirty-eight-years sick man was not overwhelmed by despair, because he was drawing power and hope from his faith in the merciful God. "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18;27) the Lord says. And we say this because the paralytic man was not healed by the Angel, who "went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water" (John 5:4), but by the Master of the Angels, Christ Himself, as Saint Chrysostom notes: "The Angel went down to the pool and troubled the water, and one man was healed; the Master of the Angels went down to the [river] Jordan and

troubled the water and healed the whole universe”.

And according to Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Christ’s presence among men is redeeming, meaning it is therapeutic. Let us hear the words of the Holy Father: “Whenever Christ appears, there salvation lies; whether He sees the publican sitting at the receipt of custom, He makes him a Disciple and an Evangelist, whether He is buried with the dead, He raises the dead and makes the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and He passes by the pools, not seeking the buildings, but healing the sick”.

If God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ in His Incarnation from the pure flesh of the Ever-Virgin Theotokos Mary, through the Holy Spirit, appeared in the heavens and on the earthly world; now through His three-day burial, the cathode into Hades and His glorious and victorious Resurrection, He appeared even to the nethermost depths, as the hymnographer Saint John Damascene says: “When Thou didst descend unto death, O Life Immortal, then didst Thou slay Hades with the lightning of Thy Divinity. And when Thou didst also raise the dead out of the nethermost depths, all the powers in the Heavens cried out: O life-giver, Christ our God, glory be to Thee” (Ochoechos Apolytikion tone 2).

Christ’s resurrection my dear Brethren, announced our transition from death into life, into the freedom from the bondage of sin, as Saint Paul preaches: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2). Interpreting this phrase, Saint Theodoritos says “law of sin means ‘dynasty’ of sin”, while Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: “he calls sin and law of death the carnal mindset which leads us to every evil deed”.

According to Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Jesus chose the bedridden paralytic man because he had a heavy load of sins and long-term suffering due to his sickness ...he was sick in both body and soul”, for this reason, He told him “Wilt thou be made whole?” (John 5;6). And our Holy Father Cyril adds:

“Because salvation stems from faith, for this the paralytic heard the word ‘wilt’, so that his will would bring the reaction, and this happened only with Jesus’ word, which is not comprehended by the physicians. Those who heal the infirmities of the soul cannot say to anyone; ‘wilt thou be made whole?’ However, Jesus grants the will and receives the faith, and offers the gift [of healing] for free”.

This historic event of the paralytic man’s healing manifested the excessive power of God-man Christ, because He healed an incurable disease, and also showed His philanthropy, because, as Saint Chrysostom says: “the one who was most worthy of His mercy and benevolence, [the paralytic man] did the guardian and philanthropist [Christ] see before all others”.

Indeed, the paralytic man received the mercy and benevolence of Christ because he showed “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21), according to His preaching: “repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). In other words, repentance is considered true when it is accompanied by faith in the Resurrected Christ, as our Redeemer and Saviour, as the only way we are led to God in safety. “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

We, my dear Brethren, are called to face all the trials in our lives but also our infirmities, having as an example the Paralytic man who endured his infirmity for thirty-eight years (John 5:5). And along with the hymnographer, let us entreat the physician of our souls and bodies, saying: “raise up my soul which is palsied by diverse sins and transgressions and by unseemly deeds and acts, that, being saved, I may also cry out: O Compassionate Redeemer, O Christ God, glory to Thy dominion and might” (Kontakion). Amen. Christ is Risen!”

After the Divine Liturgy there was a reception and then a meal, where His Beatitude addressed those present as follows:

“Come all peoples, and learn the power of the awesome mystery! For Christ our Saviour, who is the Word from the beginning, was crucified and freely suffered burial for our sake, rising from the dead that he might save all things: Come, let us worship Him” (Octoechos, Praises tone 3, Troparion 1).

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Noble President of the Church Committee,

Respected Members

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The event of the resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ is being repeated in the Great Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, namely in the Divine Liturgy, during which we are called to participate in the Body and Blood of the resurrected Christ.

The Holy Church of Christ, and especially the Church of Jerusalem, has preserved throughout the centuries “the good thing which has been committed unto us” (2 Tim. 1:14), which is our Apostolic faith and tradition, along with the unity of the members of the body of the Church and the Rum-Orthodox identity, or better say, their “Al-Intima”.

For the second time this year, we celebrate Easter amidst challenges and sad episodes. Peoples and nations are tested by the fear, insecurity and wounds caused by the covid-19 pandemic and the fire of the warfare. Nevertheless, the hypostatic and unwaning Light of Christ’s Resurrection shines through. And this because “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8), Saint Paul preaches. An undeniable testimony of this truth is the empty Tomb of the Resurrected Christ, our Saviour, but also our Holy Church, the

Body of Christ in this world, which became the guardian of the empty Tomb, but also the herald of the joyous and hopeful message "Christ is Risen!"

This very message, "Christ is Risen!", has given the Christians of the Holy Land the power and the courage to face death, destruction, the oppression of slavery and of fear, but also of the insecurity, always paying heed to Saint Paul's advice: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity" (1 Cor. 16:13-14).

This charity in Christ we proclaimed today, both the clergy and the people, in the Divine Liturgy, in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

In conclusion, we assure you, my dear brethren, that the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem is the spiritual and physical Ark that the Lord has created and no man, for the salvation of those who dwell in it.

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