



15. July 2022

Dedication of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre

Dear listeners, today we will leave the usual framework of our daily meditations, because here in Jerusalem, where I am currently with Harpa Dei, the Feast of the Dedication of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre is celebrated on this day. This church is both the place where Jesus was crucified and also the site of his Resurrection. These two essential places for Christianity - Calvary and the Sepulchre - are at the centre of liturgical celebrations and pilgrimages.

On the occasion of this feast, we want to share with you today a little of our ministry in the Holy Land. In addition, we want you all to know that we always take listeners to the Cross of the Lord, and include them in our times of prayer in this holy place.

After not having been in Jerusalem for more than two years, due to restrictions related to the coronavirus, we were finally able to return to the Holy City, which for the previous years had become our spiritual home and where we used to spend much of our time. Many pilgrims are now also returning, although certainly in smaller numbers than before the crisis.

The Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre is unique in many ways. One great peculiarity is that Greek Orthodox, Armenians, Roman Catholics and Copts "live together" here, and they all have rights in this church and celebrate their respective, very different liturgies in the holy places. Thus, in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, sacred chants resound, sometimes from midnight until morning, and always in the early hours of the morning.

We - that is, I (Bro. Elias), Harpa Dei and Sr. Corinna - spend the first hours of our morning prayer in silence at Calvary, before the Cross of the Lord. In the early morning there are usually few people praying; the pilgrim groups usually start arriving a little later.

As we pray, we listen in the background to the Armenian liturgy, which starts around 3:30. Despite being a small people, Armenians are present at many of the holy sites in Jerusalem. As the first nation to adopt Christianity as an official religion (in the early

4th century), Armenia has a liturgy of millennia-long tradition, with chants that resound throughout the Basilica of the Holy Mysteries. One of the most beautiful is the "Surb", which we hear in the background: *"Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord, God of hosts"*.

Also the Copts are present in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, who are the Christians of Egypt. Surrounded by a Muslim majority, these Christians have often demonstrated their fidelity to Christ even at the cost of their lives. The Copts celebrate their liturgy three times a week at 5:00 at the back of the tomb. The chant "Epouro" (which we hear in the background) is considered one of the most beautiful liturgical songs of the Coptic Church: *"O King of peace, give us Your peace and forgive us our sins"*.

Sometimes simultaneously with the Coptic liturgy, the Latin Mass of the Franciscans is celebrated every day at 6:30 before the Sepulchre of the Lord, except on Fridays, when it takes place on Calvary. Thanks to the courage of St. Francis of Assisi, who went out to meet the sultan, the Franciscans have been custodians of the holy places for more than 800 years. In the Basilica they often celebrate the votive Mass of the Resurrection, the opening verse of which we are listening to in the background.

Three or four times a week, the Greek Orthodox celebrate their Divine Liturgy around midnight, so that the doors of the church open at that time and it is possible to take part in the celebration. Orthodox pilgrims usually come in large numbers, even in the middle of the night. Their liturgy is characterised by great solemnity, and during the Easter Season the Easter acclamation that we hear in the background resounds again and again: *"Christ is risen from the dead, by death trampling down upon death, and to those in the tombs He has granted life"*.

We, as a small group, sing early morning Lauds and evening Vespers and Compline in the Chapel of the Invention of the Holy Cross, which is, so to speak, the crypt of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. It is the place where St. Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, found the Cross of Christ. When we sing the Liturgy of the Hours, not infrequently people come and listen for a while or stay until the end, deeply absorbed in the chanting. Sometimes they are whole groups of pilgrims. In this way, they can experience a moment of recollection and serenity in this large church which, due to the many visitors, is often very noisy and hectic during the day.

In this way, our Divine Office also becomes an apostolate, by God's grace, and we have received moving testimonies that show what sacred music can do for people.

With this brief account and the sacred songs of the various liturgies, which express the richness of the Church and which come together in Jerusalem, we hope that we have been able to spiritually transport you to the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, also known as the "church of the Anastasis", i.e. of the Resurrection.