Holy Saturday

Today the eyes of the Christian world focuses on the Tomb of Jesus. Usually the Tomb is called the Empty Tomb, but today the tomb is not empty. Today the Church remembers Jesus’ body being placed after the crucifixion on Friday in a new Tomb that St. Joseph of Arimathea had prepared.

This Tomb is called a rolling stone tomb, hewn in the rock of the artificial wall that had been created by the quarriers in the stone quarry pit called Calvary/Golgotha. Today in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre only a small fragment of that unique tomb is still visible in the Syrian Chapel (owned by the Armenians) called the Chapel of St. Joseph of Arimathea.

Yesterday, we thought about the Crusader Stone of Anointing, but in the first century rolling stone (kokh) tomb complex, there was a preparation room in the ‘family tomb’ for the body to be prepared. Actually, the people who prepared the body stood in a narrow trench and the body being prepared was on ground level. After the body had been prepared, it would have been put in one of the kokh tombs where the body would remain for a couple of years before it was taken from the tomb and the bones would be placed in an ossuary for secondary burial.

Today in the Holy Sepulchre stands a monumental tomb, called an edicule. The first monumental edicule having been built by Constantine and his mother, Helena, in the fourth century. It is at this edicule that the major service of Holy Fire takes place at 1pm on Saturday afternoon. It is from here that the Light of Christ comes each year to refresh the world. It is the most incredible service you will ever experience in your life.

After the Greek Orthodox procession makes its way around the Tomb three times, the Patriarch and the Armenian Archimandrite are frisked to make sure they have no lighters, matches or flints that could start a fire. Then the two go into the edicule, which had earlier been checked to make sure there was nothing in the tomb that could start a fire. Will the Light of Christ come? When the first flicker of the new light of Christ is seen, a shout goes up throughout the Holy Sepulchre, Alleluia, Alleluia, Christ is Risen, Christ is Risen Indeed. Alleluia.

What other church, what other cathedral, what other basilica hosts an Empty Tomb? Only in Jerusalem and because of that Empty Tomb, we are all citizens of Jerusalem.

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