

THE FEAST OF THE GREAT MARTYR ST. GEORGE IN ACRE

On Saturday, 23rd April/ 6th May 2017, the memory of the Great Martyr St. George the Trophy-bearer was celebrated by the Patriarchate at his Holy Church in Acre –the ancient Ptolemais in north Israel.

The Church honours St. George as he confessed Christ to the Roman army, where he was serving, and for this reason he martyred in Rome, from where his Holy relic was transferred to Palestine, his birthplace on his mother side, in the town of Lydda, where a great Church was founded by St. Helen.

This “conceivable diamond of patience” did the Jerusalem Patriarchate honour by the Divine Liturgy on the morning of the feast in Acre-Ptolemais.

The Divine Liturgy was led by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with concelebrants the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, among whom was Archimandrite Sophronios the Hegoumen of Ailaboun and Arab-speaking Presbyters, Priests of the towns in the surrounding to Acre area, Archdeacon Mark, Deacon Anastasios, at the singing of the choir led by Archimandrite Philotheos. Present were, Mr. Kouroumalos the delegate of the Greek Embassy in Israel and many Orthodox people.

To this congregation His Beatitude gave the following Sermon:

“Come as we all gladly celebrate the all-festive, glorious, radiant Resurrection of Christ, let us also celebrate the shining festival of the holy Great Martyr-George; with flowers of springtime, come let us now crown him who hath proved invincible, that by his most mighty entreats we may be

redeemed from afflictions, tribulations, and all our iniquities” the hymn writer of the Church proclaims.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims,

The all-glorious memorial of the Great Martyr Saint George the triumphant hath shined upon us together with the Paschal Feast of the Resurrection of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, and has gathered us today in order to celebrate the inauguration of our new life in the risen Christ.

To this new life in Christ communicant and participant did Saint George the triumphant become, as well as a Great Martyr of Christ’s love, who “poureth rains of miracles upon us from above” as his hymn writer says. Christ’s friend George managed this because he was enlightened by the Unwaning and Uncreated Light of Christ’s Resurrection. For this reason the hymn writer says: “since thou art limpidly illuminated with the whole light of the Trinity, O all-blessed George, as an invincible Martyr, as a champion of piety, as a divinely crowned victor, save by thine intercessions, O Heaven-dweller, them that honour thee”.

Christ’s resurrection my beloved ones, is what constitutes the fundamental truth of the Christian faith and the Holy Pascha the Feast of Feasts of the Eastern Orthodox Church, as described by the hymn writer: “This chosen and holy day is the first of the Sabbaths, the queen and lady, the feast of feasts, and the festival of festivals, wherein we bless Christ unto the ages”.

The day of the Resurrection is “chosen and holy and the first of the Sabbaths” because it is the day of the Lord, the Lord’s Day (Kyriaki). According to Saint Gregory Palamas, “the resurrection of the Lord is the renewal of the human nature, it is the bestowal and re-making and the return to the immortal life of the first Adam who was devoured by death due

to sin and through death he was retraced to the earth by which he was made”.

In other words, Saint Gregory continues, “Having risen from the dead, Christ is not conquered at all by death anymore; because having resurrected Himself on the third day, He is the only one who did not return to earth again, but he was ascended in heaven, making our human flesh which he had received for himself to share the same throne with the Father as identical to God. For this reason Christ is the only one who became the beginning of the future resurrection of all people and the only one who became the beginning of the dead and firstfruits of the dead as well as the father of the time to come. And as all people, sinners and righteous die because of the (Old) Adam, likewise, because of Christ (the New Adam), all, sinners and righteous will be vivified, “but every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death”(1 Cor. 15:22-26) at the general resurrection with the last trumpet. As St. Paul teaches, “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1 Cor. 15:53-55).

The Saints of the Church in general and the martyrs of the Gospel teaching in particular, are those, who became imitators of Christ’s life, His godly life, and were granted the vision of His divine and unapproachable glory. The glory which our Lord Jesus Christ revealed at the working of His miracles and

especially at His transfiguration on Mount Tabor and exceptionally at His radiant Resurrection in Jerusalem.

Having become a spectator of this unapproachable glory St. George is now illustrious in heaven and prays to Christ our God for all who follow him, as his hymn writer says: "Since now hast thou laid hold on that blessed life that is hid in Christ, for which thou foughtest even unto blood, O glorious George, ask that they who praise thee with faith may be saved from every adversity, O prizewinner".

That which captivated and of course has still been captivating every human soul of good will is "the hidden life in Christ". This life is revealed and shown in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ who said: "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).

Truthful witnesses of this fact are the Saints of the Church who have been sacrificed in favour of Christ's blood, among whom is St. Great Martyr George the triumphant that we honour today. An also exceptionally truthful witness is the Most Blessed Glorious Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary, who kept in her womb God the Logos who has no beginning as the hymn writer says: "The tabernacle of testimony, wherein were the tablets, the urn, and the golden ark, prefigured thee, O all-pure Theotokos; for as that contained those, so heldest thou in thy womb the beginningless Word when He received a body".

The Paschal Feast of St. George's memory calls us to participate in the joy and gladness of this salvific fact on the one hand, and on the other hand to entreat the parressia towards God of the Martyr and trophy-bearer and most blessed George for the salvation of our souls and for the prevailing of peace in our highly tested region and the whole world. Christ is risen!"

For the Sermon in Arabic please follow the link below:

<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ar/2017/05/06/30276>

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a Procession led by the Scouts, three times around the Holy Church and in front of the Tomb of the New Martyr St. George the Cypriot who slept in the Lord in 1750.

Consequently there was a reception with addresses given by Seich-Imam Samir Asaf, and Omar Kagiya representative of the Muslims, the Israeli Deputy Mayor of Acre, Mr. Kouroumalos the delegate of the Greek Embassy in Tel Aviv, the representative of the Baha'I, Mr. Safik, President of the "Acre" Community Council, the Patriarchal Commissioner in Acre Archimandrite Philotheos, who underlined the significance of the restoration project of the Sacred Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre by His Beatitude. To all the above His Beatitude replied with the following address:

"The righteous man shall flourish like a palm tree, and like a cedar in Lebanon shall he be multiplied. They that are planted in the house of the Lord, in the courts of our God they shall blossom forth [the righteous]" (Psalm 91:13-14).

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Your Honour Mr. President and members of the Community Board,

Like another blossomed palm tree and cedar of Lebanon which has been planted in the house of God, the Great Martyr of the righteousness and love of God George the Trophy-bearer is celebrated today.

George is indeed the "righteous of God". For this reason his annual memory is not only observed by the Eastern Orthodox Church but also by the faithful of the other heavenly religions.

George was distinguished for his ardent love for "God's

righteous one", Christ, who preached the Gospel of righteousness, love and freedom but also the full respect towards the human being.

St. George's personality belongs to the chora of the Saint Prophets and friends of God, who condemned and denied the idolatry and the arrogance of the world-rulers of their era, not only by words, but also with their mission and especially by their martyrdom. And this they managed to accomplish through their clear faith towards God the lover of man, our Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified and resurrected from the dead for our sake and for the sake of all people.

Christ's resurrection, the victory of life against the death of corruption and sin, of the true and unwaning light against darkness, of righteousness against injustice, and of love against hatred, would always inspire young George, who finally became "communicant of the passion of the Dispassionate, and of His rising", as the hymn writer says: "Cultivating with all care the saving seed of God's commands, thou didst piously disperse all of thy riches to the poor and in return didst acquire Christ's eternal glory. Then boldly wentest thou to conflicts with the foe and unheard-of pains, O glorious Martyr George; and as a sharer in the Passion and Rising of the Dispassionate, thou sharest also now in His Kingdom, praying for us in fervour".

This Great Martyr of God's love and righteousness that we have honoured today in his homonymous Church in the historic multi-national, multi-religious and multi-cultural town of Acre, let us entreat in prayer to intercede for our souls and the peace of our region and of the whole world.

On this occasion we would like to thank the representative and spiritual Hegoumen Archimandrite Philotheos and his associates for his hospitality and warm welcome.

Especially we thank the local authorities the police and all

the representatives of the religious communities, Christian, Muslim, Druze and Baha'i, for their participation in this festal and paschal celebration of St. George. Amen. Christ is risen! Many happy returns."

For the address in Arabic please follow the link below:

<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ar/2017/05/06/30278>

Finally, a rich meal was offered by the Patriarchal Commissioner Archimandrite Philotheos in honour of His Beatitude and many of the congregation.

From Secretariat-General

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