

THE FEAST OF OUR FATHER AMONG THE SAINTS ONUPHRIUS (2017)

On Sunday, 12th/25th June 2017, the Patriarchate celebrated the memory of our Father among the Saints Onuphrius of Egypt, at his Holy Monastery located in the district of the ancient Jerusalem, opposite Siloam font and on the slopes of Abu Tor hill, by the carved rocks – tombs of the field of blood – the potter's field, which was bought by the Pharisees to bury the strangers with the thirty silver coins that Judas returned to them when he regretted the betrayal of his Teacher (Mat. 27:3-10). Among these tombs visible are the tombs of the Patriarch of Jerusalem Iouvenalios (541 A.D.) and of monk Cyril, renovator of the Monastery around 1923.

In this Holy Church – naturally half-carved rock – for the memory of St. Onuphrius of Egypt, who lived an ascetic life in Thebais of Egyp in the 4th century A.D., having only his long beard as garment, as witnessed by St. Pafnutius who buried him, Vespers was held in the evening, led by the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, and the Divine Liturgy was celebrated on the day of the feast, officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, together with the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, and the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and Archdeacon Marc. Participants in prayer were a noble congregation of monks, nuns, laity, members of the Greek Expatriates community and the Arab-speaking congregation, at the singing of Archimandrite Demetrios Kavathas and by the end of the service, also Archimandrite Eusevios.

His Beatitude preached the Divine Word to the noble congregation as follows:

“Godly-wise Father Onuphrius, in spirit thou didst become

great Elias' follower, for thou dwellest far removed from the turbulence of the world; thou didst deny all the yearnings of the flesh and didst abide in the barren wilderness, where, with exceeding joy, thou, O blessed man, didst soar aloft in soul to the Heavens, where thou truly hadst thy citizenship" the hymn writer of the Church proclaims.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims.

The most bright light of our Saviour Christ, the Holy Spirit Who abides in the souls of His Saints, has gathered us all today in this holy shrine, where the Holy Monastery of the celebrated our Father among the Saints Onuphrius lies, in order to offer glory and thanksgiving to our Holy Trinitarian God.

The annual observation of the memories of the Saints by our Holy Orthodox Church is on the one hand a recalling of the life in Christ in this world of corruption and sin, and on the other, an invitation to the heavenly chamber where our Holy Father Onuphrius rejoices eternally.

Our Father among the Saints Onuphrius, who lived a coenobitic life in a monastery in the town Hermoupolis of Thebes in Egypt, retreated to the depths of the desert where he was distinguished as its citizen and a student of the spirit of the Holy Prophets, Elijah of Thesbis, and John the Baptist, who had become imitators of God, as St. Paul says: "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour" (Eph.5:1-2). And in more detail, since God has forgiven you, become therefore imitators of God as dear children. And live in love, just like Christ loved us and gave Himself up for our sakes and our salvation, and offer a sacrifice to God, so that this sacrifice will be before Him as a sweet smelling savour.

Interpreting these words of Paul, St. Chrysostom says; "See that to suffer by the enemies is a sweet smelling savour and a well pleasing sacrifice; and if you die, then it is a sacrifice; this is an imitation of God".

Indeed our Father among the Saints Onuphrius accomplished the death of imperishableness through his hard asceticism in the desert. In other words he became a sweet smelling savour and a well pleasing sacrifice to our God and Saviour Christ, as the hymn writer of the Church proclaims: "Offering thy mind as a whole-burnt offering unto Him Who endured death by the Cross for our sakes, thou worthily becamest a partaker and joint heir of His glory".

Precisely to this cause we also are called my beloved Brothers and Sisters, to become worthy communicants and co-heirs of the glory of our Saviour Christ and His Saints. This is the purpose of our calling in the faith of the crucified and resurrected our Lord Jesus Christ, as St. Paul preaches: "whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Romans 8:30).

What does this mean: "whom he justified, them he also glorified"? It means the restoration of our communion in Christ with God the Father. The restoration of the communion and the vision of the Divine glory, which Adam of old lost due to his disobedience to the will of God.

The Saints of Christ's Church received the crown of righteousness because they had become obedient to the Divine will and steadfast in the Orthodox faith as the hymn writer of our Father among the Saints Onuphrius says: " thou hast accomplished the path of asceticism and kept the faith; therefore O Father of righteousness thou hast received the crown of righteousness, which Christ hadst prepared for thee, He who giveth the prizes and the strength and the antidote of the pains; of which now deliver us also and save us from dangers."

The "path of ascesis" of our Father among the Saints Onuphrius was the path of Christ's love according to the example of St. Paul who says: "walk in love" (Eph. 5:2). And Christ's love is at the top of the commandments. And this is so, because "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16) according to St. John the Evangelist.

Our holy Church honours the annual memory of its Saints because it is through them that we come to know the "path of ascesis" namely the way of our completion in Christ, as the hymn writer says: "the crowds of the monastics honour thee the teacher of the desert Onuphrius; for it is through thee that we have come to know the right path...wherefore beseech the Lord that our souls find mercy."

God's righteous men and friends of Christ indeed intercede the Lord for the mercy of our souls and the healing of the sick "who come to them in faith". However, faith without love towards our neighbour "is empty" it has no value, as John the Evangelist says: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20).

The honoured today Saints Onuphrius of Egypt and Peter of Mount Athos, who while being of the same nature with us humans, were deemed worthy of the vision of the Divine splendid glory, call us to walk in the path of the life in Christ. To this cause, we have helpers and protectors especially and exceptionally the Most Blessed Theotokos and Mother of God, the All-Holy and Ever-Virgin Mary as well as the Holy Saints who intercede for us to the Lord. Amen."

After the Divine Liturgy there was a small Procession from the Church towards the tomb of the founder and renovator of the monastery monk Cyril, where the prayer for the fruit was read and there was also a memorial service at the tomb of the recently reposed nun of the Monastery Seraphima.

Afterwards, a reception with cakes and fruit followed at the hegoumeneion, as offered by the present renovator of the Monastery, Abbess Paessia.

From Secretariat-General

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