

THE FEAST OF ST. GERASIMUS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Saturday March 4/17, 2018, the Patriarchate celebrated the commemoration of St. Gerasimus of the Jordan at his Holy Monastery in the valley of Jordan on the west bank of the river near Jericho.

Having arrived in the Holy Land from his country, Asia Minor in the middle of the 5th century, St. Gerasimus strove in asceticism in various Palestinian Monasteries, until he founded his own Monastery, the Lavra of Kalamon. There, he led thousands of monks to the Orthodox Doctrine of the 4th Ecumenical Synod of Chalcedon, of the two Natures of Christ in His One Hypostasis.

In this Holy Feast, after the warm welcome of the Scouts, the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitoliass, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Alexander of Pereyaslav in Ukraine, the Most Reverend Archbishops Aristarchos of Constantina, Demetrios of Lydda, Philoumenos of Pella and the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis. Participants in the prayer were also the Most Reverend Archbishop Theophylactos of Jordan, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Nikolaos of Mesogaia from the Church of Greece, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, with first in rank Archimandrite Meletios, followed by the Hegoumen of Fhes Archimandrite Ieronymos, the Hegoumen of the Monastery of the Shepherds Archimandrite Ignatios and local Priests; Fr. Issa Mousleh, and Fr. George Bananoura, Archdeacon Mark and Deacon Anastasios. In the choir, Archimandrite Aristovoulos and the choir singer Demetrios chanted in Greek, Arabic, Russian and

Romanian. The service was attended by a large congregation of pilgrims from various countries.

His Beatitude preached the Divine word to this congregation as follows;

“The ladder of divine virtue, thou didst scale with ardour, and thou didst attain to the height of divine noetic vision, receiving reflections pure and clear, revealing the divine mysteries of Christ. Hence we honour thee with piety, as we cry, Gerasimus, thou God-bearer: Glory to Christ, Who hath given thee strength. Glory to Him Who hath crowned thee. Glory to Him Who worketh healings for all through thee”; The melodist of the Church proclaims.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims

The abundance of the grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us all in this place of the desert, the place of the preaching for repentance by St. John the Forerunner and Baptist, in order to praise in thanksgiving and doxology the sacred memory of our Father among the Saints Gerasimus who was glorified through his asceticism in the Jordan area.

Giving heed to the words of the psalmist: “Lo, I have fled afar off and have dwelt in the wilderness” (Ps. 54:8), St. Gerasimus left his home town in Lycia of Asia Minor and according to the witness of Cyril of Skythopolis, in his book “Lives of Saints”, he mastered the monastic life with many feats against the evil spirits and retreated to the Jordan area to become an anchorite.

Just like the deer runs towards the springs of water with great desire, similarly St. Gerasimus’ soul thirsted ardently for nothing else but the Living God. As David the psalmist says: “My soul thirsted for God, the mighty, the living; when shall I come, and appear before the face of God?” (Ps. 41:3).

In other words, having realized the importance of the soul, St. Gerasimus despised the earthly treasures for the sake of the heavenly immortal goods, namely the righteousness and vision of the glory of God, according to David's words: "But as for me, in righteousness shall I appear before Thy face; I shall be filled when Thy glory is made manifest to me" (Ps. 16:15). And in more detail, I will work righteousness and through it I will see with the eyes of my soul your face [My God], my soul will be filled at the sight of the glory and the radiance of your face. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Mat. 5:8) says the Lord.

Life in Christ, namely the Christian's struggle to attain his union with God, or rather to gain the gift of the illumination of the Holy Spirit is the ultimate purpose of the Church, which is the mystical body of Christ in the world. "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12) says the Lord.

This very "light of life", namely of the true and eternal life, is what our Father among the Saints Gerasimus gained, through the absolute renouncing of the worldly life of this era, and his retreat to the desert. He did this following St. John the Baptist, the Apostles, the God-bearing Fathers, Confessors, Martyrs, and Athletes of Christ, as well as his contemporary dwellers of the desert of Judea and around the river Jordan.

The dwellers of the desert who lived a life in Christ, my dear brothers, are no others than the citizens of the living God's city (Hebrews 12:22), namely the Church of Christ, the heavenly Jerusalem, where the Angels and all the Saints feast and spread joy and jubilation abundantly.

To this very Church, the Synaxis and Communion of God's beloved and chosen children who have been registered as heavenly citizens, have we also become members, all of us who

bear Christ's name. We have drawn nigh to God through the incarnate God the Word and His Only Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ; and this God is the Father and Judge of all. We have also drawn nigh to the spirits of the righteous who have become perfect as St. Paul preaches: "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Hebrews 12:22-23).

Behold therefore why the hymn writer of the Church proclaims: "At the commemoration of Thy martyrs, O Lord, the whole creation keeps festival; heaven with the angels greatly rejoices, and the earth with all mankind makes glad. At their intercessions have mercy upon us".

Indeed my dear ones, the heavens rejoice and the earth is made glad today on the annual commemoration of our Holy and righteous Gerasimus of the Jordan, who "scaled with ardour the ladder of divine virtue and attained to the height of divine noetic vision".

Towards this "height of divine noetic vision" are we also called my dear brothers, by our Holy Father Gerasimus and especially at the period of Great Lent, as the hymn writer says: "Slaying the wild beasts of the passions with fasting, let us draw nigh unto Christ through dispassion and purity".

This means that Christ is nigh to all of us, waiting for us to approach Him, having first cleansed ourselves through the time of Lent, which is the incriminator of sin and the advocate of repentance. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded" (James 4:7-8), St. James the Brother of God advices us.

Come let us draw nigh Christ our God, entreating the Mother of God, the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary and asking our Holy Father Gerasimus, saying along with the melodist: "Standing by Christ along with the Saints, Holy Gerasimus, intercede for those who keep your Holy Commemoration", and deem us worthy to draw nigh also to the Resurrection of our Saviour Christ. Amen. Many Happy Returns!"

After the Divine Liturgy there was a Litany around the Holy Monastery and finally a festal fasting meal at the refectory.

From Secretariat-General

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