

THE FEAST OF PROPHET ELISHA AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Thursday, June 14/27, 2019, the Patriarchate celebrated the commemoration of Holy Prophet Elisha at the Church dedicated to him, at the centre of the town of Jericho by the sycamore tree of Zachaeus.

The Church honours St. Elisha, son of Saphat from the land of Abelmeholah as a great Prophet, who was called to be Prophet Elijah's disciple, he accepted the call and learned by him, working great miracles by the Divine Grace at the district of Jericho and the Jordan river. Some of these were the turning of the bitter waters of Jericho into drinking water, the healing of King of Syria Neeman from his leprosy, and the walking on the waters of river Jordan stepping on Elijah's fleece. Prophet Elijah had thrown his fleece to Elisha and gave him two-fold his grace when he was carried on the fiery chariot into heavens (4 Kings, 11-14).

In this Church, the Divine Liturgy was led by His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina and the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, among whom Archimandrite Chrysostom and Fr. Kyriakos, Archimandrite Ignatios, Arab-speaking Priests among whom Fr. Yusef Hodali, Archdeacon Mark and Deacon Eulogios, while the service was attended by a congregation from the town of Jericho and pilgrims from elsewhere.

His Beatitude sermon to this congregation is the one below;

“Rejoice, O Elisha, who while on earth hast shown an example of a life equal to the Angels, and while in the flesh hast lived without a peer. Since thou didst preserve the eye of thy

soul pure of all that is material, O Prophet, thou was counted worthy to foresee things to come by the clear light of the Spirit" the hymn writer of the Church proclaims.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims

The grace of Prophet Elisha has called us in this Holy place of the Biblical town of Jericho, where the waters were "bitter but they were healed" in order to festively celebrate the Prophet's commemoration in his holy Monastery.

"God is wondrous in his saints" (Psalm 67:36), the Prophet-King David says. Indeed, Prophet Elisha is distinguished among the Prophets because God worked great miracles through this chosen Prophet, whose anointing to the prophetic gift was done at the command of God, by Prophet Elijah, whose heir he became. "And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room" (3 Kings 19:15-16).

As it is well known, Prophet Elijah found Elisha plowing his field at the valley of the river Jordan, and called him to follow him, throwing over him his fleece. "And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, go back again: for what have I done to thee?" (3 Kings 19:20-21). This event shows that Elisha became not only Prophet Elijah's heir, but also an instrument of the mystery of the Divine Revelation, namely a vessel of the lighting power of the Holy Spirit.

Referring to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, in the Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul ranks the Prophets directly after the Apostles by saying; "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets" (1 Cor. 12:28). "Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye

may prophesy” St. Paul advises again (1 Cor. 14:1). And elsewhere he says; “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:19-20).

In these God-inspired words of the Apostle of the nations, it is clearly shown that both the Apostles, the sanctified vessels of the Grace of the Gospel, and the Prophets, the God-inspired instruments of the Law of Moses, are the foundation stones, while Christ is the corner stone, on which the structure of the Church is based. The Church of Christ, in other words, is the one that unites in a harmonious and inseparable unity the Old with the New Testament. “For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matt. 5:18).

The Holy Church of Christ honours and venerates the commemoration of the holy Prophets, and of Prophet Elisha, because they belong to the heavenly body of the “fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19). Let us hear the holy hymn writer saying; “Rejoice, Elisha supremely wise; for after cleansing thy mind of the carnal desires and lusts, thou within thee didst receive God the Spirit’s clear shining beams, which thou didst pass on to all, O glorious one, and didst appear wholly like unto the light. Hence, thou art gone to dwell in the never-setting light that is on high, ever praying for us all, who praise and honour thee”.

We are also called to this “never-setting light”, namely our mystical union with God in heavens, by Prophet Elisha, my dear brothers and sisters, in order to dwell in “the eternal dwelling places” (Luke 16:9).

And the Church of Christ on earth, is the dwelling place where

the cleansing of our souls and bodies is being accomplished, a cleansing from the spiritual leprosy, namely of sin. And we say this because today's honoured Prophet Elisha became among other things also a healer of the illness of leprosy, according to the witness of our Lord Jesus Christ who said; "And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4:27).

In the general Epistle of St. James, the Brother of God, the Prophets are projected as examples to imitate. "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience" (James 5:10).

Such an example of suffering affliction, of long-suffering but also of intercession towards God for the sick, those who suffer injustice, and those tested by misdemeanors have we the luminary of the world, Elisha the Prophet.

Let us therefore entreat St. Elisha and along with the hymn writer say; "Thou Prophet and herald of Christ, at no time art thou ever separated from the throne of majesty, yet thou art ever present at the side of every one in sickness; while ministering in the highest, thou dost bless the whole world and art everywhere glorified. As thou forgiveness for our souls". Amen. Many Happy Returns!"

Before dismissal His Beatitude read the prayer for the fruit, especially for the grapes.

After the Divine Liturgy the Hegoumen of the Shrine Archimandrite Philoumenos offered a meal to the Patriarchal Entourage and others.

From Secretariat-General