

HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM BLESSES THE JUBILEE OF STEWARD PRIEST GEORGE AWAD

On Sunday July 8/21, 2019, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos officiated the Divine Liturgy at the Holy Church of the Holy Great Martyr George the Trophy-bearer, in town Jifna – Biblical Gofna – at the outskirts of Ramallah.

The Divine Liturgy was celebrated also on the celebration of the golden jubilee, the completion of fifty years of fruitful dedicated Priestly ministry of Fr. George Awad from Beit Sahour, who has served in Gaza, Toulkarem, and Rafidia of the town of Samaria.

Co-celebrants to His Beatitude were the Most Reverend Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Archimandrite Ignatios, Hegoumen of Beit Sahour and Beit Jalla, Arab-speaking Priests, Fr. George's son, Archimandrite Porphyrios from the Holy Metropolis Rethymnis and Avlopotamou of the Church of Crete, and his son who serves at the H. Metropolis of Fthiotida of the Church of Greece, Fr. Issa Mousleh, Representative of the Patriarchate Press in the Arab-speaking M.M., Fr. Boulos from Beit Jalla, and Fr. George Banoura from Beit Sahour. Present at the service were the Orthodox faithful of the town, as well as Governmental Representatives of the Palestinian State.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude read the following sermon;

“ A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not

sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed. For it is the jubilee; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field” (Leviticus 25:11-12) the Lord orders through His servant Moses.

Reverend Father George, Steward of our Hagiographite noble flock of the town of Jifna, and officiating Priest of the Holy Church of St. George the Great Martyr,

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, noble Christians

“Grace and peace of our God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ be with you”; we have been gathered in this holy Eucharistic service in order to celebrate the jubilee year, namely the fiftieth year (Leviticus 25:10) of the Priestly ministry of Father George in our Holy Church.

The Biblical reference of the jubilee year does not only refer to the completion of fifty years according to the Law of Moses, in the Old Testament, but also to the “proclaiming liberty throughout the land” namely of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the New Testament.

The jubilee year has been called also “year to proclaim liberty” because during this year there was a proclamation of liberty from debts but also liberty of the people from slavery. It was also a year dedicated to the Lord, therefore it was called holy (Leviticus 25:11-12).

“The proclamation of liberty”, namely the wailing of the promise of the people’s freedom from the curse of the Law was done by our God and Saviour Jesus Christ who was crucified, as St. Paul preaches; “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Gal. 3:13).

In other words, the testament of Grace that had been agreed for us in Christ is our freedom from the law and the power of

sin and of death as St. Paul says; "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2).

We enjoy the freedom in Christ within the Church, which is the body of Christ, and according to Paul, Christ is the head of this body; "And he is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18). Interpreting these words our Father among the Saints Theophylactos says: "[St. Paul] did not see the fullness of the congregation of the Church, but the body, in order to show the precision of His closeness to us and that He took upon Himself "homoousion" (same essence) flesh to ours."

"Homoousios (of the same essence) is the head to the body; likewise He also is homoousios (of the same essence) to us humans".

Moreover the Church is the vineyard of the Lord and in this vineyard the Priests and the deacons of the bloodless altar of the Lord are continuously ministering as workers, offering the praise of sacrifice to God through Christ (Hebrews 13:15). In addition, the ministers of the Lord offer "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men" (1 Tim. 2:1). They take care of the Church of God, as St. Paul says (1 Tim. 3:5). Therefore the psalmist prays by saying; "Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness" (Psalm 132:9), while the Lord says: "I will also clothe her priests [of Jerusalem, that is the Church] with salvation" (Psalm 132:16), I will surround them with the power of salvation. And this power of salvation is the grace of the Holy Spirit which establishes and perfects the Priests.

Our Lord's words "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16) do not only refer to His disciples and apostles, but also to their successors the Bishops and the Priests who minister the mystery of the divine incarnation of God the Word's Providence, who give glory to the Lord in this

Temple according to the psalmist; "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 29:2).

Dear Father George,

Your undertaking of the degree of the Priesthood in the yard of the Lord, the Church of Christ, has made you its worthy minister, therefore your motherly Church of Jerusalem salutes you today with the words of the Lord; "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21).

And what is the joy into which you are called to enter? It is the "transmission of many good things" according to Zigavinos, it is "the fullness of beatitude" according to St. Chrysostom. This is the completion of the fiftieth year of liturgic and pastoral ministering of the Church. For this reason St. Paul says: "For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 3:13).

You have preached this very Orthodox faith and tradition of our Holy Fathers and Apostles with boldness, ministering the word of truth, the Gospel of Christ's love on the one hand, and promoting the harmonious co-existence among the faithful of the other Christian and Islamic communities on the other hand, in the towns of the Palestinian State; Nablus, Rafidia, Beit Sahour, Gaza and in present Jifna.

Your Priestly contribution to the Church and the tested Palestinian people has been recognized by our Holy and Sacred Synod and by the initiative of our Patriarchal Mediocrity has decided your awarding with the honourary distinction of the famous Order of the Cross bearers of the Holy Sepulchre, hearkening to St. Paul's words; "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour

in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5:17).

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ through the prayers of our Most Blessed Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, and the intercessions of today's honoured Holy Great Martyr Prokopios and you Patron Saint George the Trophy-bearer, be with you. Amen. Many happy returns."

After the end of the Divine Liturgy His Beatitude honoured Fr. George with the medal of the Order of Knights of the Holy Sepulchre, offered him an icon of the Theotokos and a pectoral cross and wished him the continuation of his ministry for many years to come after his jubilee.

The President of the Care takers of the Church also addressed the Priest.

At noon Fr. George offered a meal to His Beatitude and other guests. There, His Beatitude addressed Fr. George as follows;

"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men" (Romans 14:17-18) St. Paul proclaims.

Dear Father George,

Dear friends present

Feeling the ending of his ministry approaching, Great Paul says; "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Today's honorary distinction of the celebration of the jubilee of your Priesthood Farther George refers to this fact of the ministry in the Church.

The biblical term of "jubilee" which our Church especially honours has as its only purpose to preach that the mission of the Priest, of the spiritual Father and leader is not the enjoying of material things as "eating and drinking" but the evangelizing of the righteousness, of peace and of the joy in the Holy Spirit.

In other words the spiritual Father and leader should possess these spiritual and moral values which also are the fundamental principle of progress and prosperity of society as a whole and particularly of the religious communities.

And we say this because the harmonious co-existence of the various religious communities and in our case of the Muslims and Christians, depends a lot on the spiritual leadership of the community for which we also boast, hearkening to the words of Christ's Gospel; "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21).

Concluding, we would like to thank all those who honoured this feast with their presence, especially our much respected and dearest, His Excellency the President of the Palestinian State Mahmoud Abbas, through his representatives.

As for Father George, we wish strength from on high, health and longevity so that he may be pleasing to Christ our God and reliable to the people and our Roum-Orthodox Patriarchate. Many happy returns and blessed jubilee of his Priestly ministry.

Moreover we would like to congratulate warmly his wife who has been proven a true and invisible Cyrene to him during his Priestly pastoral and liturgical ministry in the Lord's Church. Amen."

From Secretariat-General

