

HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM CELEBRATES THE D. LITURGY AT THE CHURCH OF ST. MOSES THE ETHIOPIAN IN SAMARIA

On Sunday, October 7/20, 2019, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos led the Divine Liturgy at the old Church of St. Moses the Ethiopian, at the Community of Rafidia in Nablus of Samaria, not far from Jacob's well, where the Lord spoke with the Samaritan woman.

St. Moses the Ethiopian is witnessed by the Synaxarion of the Church as having lived in Ethiopia in the 4th century A.D., a former chief robber, who became contrite by an unknown event, repented and was baptized, and received the monastic schema. He founded a Monastery and led many – some of whom used to be former fellow robbers of his – to life in Christ and in salvation. St. Moses died at the age of seventy.

The Divine Liturgy was celebrated on the renovation of this Church, by the funding of the Palestinian Autonomy, that is why representatives of the State were present, among whom Mr. Ramzi Chury, President of the Palestinian Church Committee of Christian Affairs, his Secretary Mrs. Hananiye Amire, representatives of the Mayor of the district, the Ambassador of the Palestinian Autonomy in the Vatican Mr. Issa Kassiye, and other Municipal and Governmental officials.

Co-celebrants to His Beatitude were the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, Geronda Secretary-General Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Hegoumen of Rafidia, Archimandrite Leontios, the Hegoumen of

Jacob's well, Archimandrite Ioustinos, Archimandrite Porfyrios, the representative of the Patriarchate in the Arab M.M. Fr. Issa Mousleh, other Priests and Archdeacon Mark. The chanting was delivered by the Byzantine singer of the left choir of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Mr. Vasilios Gotsopoulos in Greek, and the Rafidia Community choir in Arabic, while the Community members participated in the service. His Beatitude offered an icon of the Theotokos for the Church and a Cross to Archimandrite Leontios.

His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon to this congregation;

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9), St. Peter preaches.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians

Blessed is the Lord our God, who has brought us in your beautiful town of Rafidia, in order to celebrate the commemoration of our Holy Father among the Saints Moses of Ethiopia, in the old Church dedicated to him and has been recently renovated.

This blessed Moses came from Ethiopia and lived in the 4th century. Being a slave, he was banished by his lord for his infamous works and brutal personality. Ever since, he led a sinful and illegal life, became the leader of a gang of thieves and he was renowned for being a robber.

One day he repented unexpectedly and retreated to a Monastery in a deserted area of Arabia, as Bishop Palladios of Elenoupolis mentions in his history saying; "This robber, having become contrite by some reason, gave himself in a monastery and was thus brought to the state of repentance."

In the monastery he was tested by harsh temptations, which he fought by multiplying fasting and prayer, vigils and the like manners of repentance. Many spiritual students of his, who used to be his companions in sin, followed him in the ascetic life of the desert. Saint Moses was killed by barbarians and slept in the Lord at the age of 75 in the end of the 4th century, in 400 A.D. And this was so in order to fulfil the word of our Master Christ; "all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26:52).

Our Holy Church honours his commemoration especially, because he hearkened to Christ's words; "and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). And "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:13). These words of the Lord in the Gospel denote that so great is the power of repentance that it can lead the penitent man to the light and the truth of our Lord, as the psalmist says: "send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God" (Psalm 43:3-4). Interpreting these words, Theodoritos Kyrou says: "He called the Church of God tabernacles of the Lord, Jerusalem a holy hill, and the redeeming epiphany of our Saviour Jesus Christ the light and the truth".

Indeed, my dear brothers and sisters, our Holy Father among the Saints Moses, did not only repent and was led to the light and the truth of Christ, but he also became a Priest, ministering in the Holy Altar of God. This fact reveals the depth and width of repentance, which stems from the outmost philanthropy of God "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Behold therefore why St. Paul says: "God granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18).

In other words, in His ineffable philanthropy, God does not only accept repentance, but He also makes it work within the repenting one through the workings of His grace. God

transforms the hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. He awakens the sleeping consciousness, crying out and saying: "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Eph. 5:14). And it is God who stimulates the will of the sinner in order to seek His mercy. Repentance is a gift from God, which man should accept with his free will as St. John of the Ladder states in short; "Repentance is a treaty with God for a second life", namely an agreement with God for a new life.

And this is what Saint Moses did, as St. Zosimas mentions in his notes: "Was Aba Moses not a chief robber initially, did he not do a million bad things? So that he was rejected by his Lord because of his recalcitrance? But because he entered [Christianity] bravely and with such fervent accord, we are all aware of the stature he reached so that he is counted among the chosen servants of God".

Truly, the heart of our Father among the Saints Moses became a pure habitat of the Holy Spirit, as his hymn writer says: "Thy heart, made to shine by visions and labours, was shown to be a pure dwelling-place of the Spirit, O all-blessed Father". Our Father Moses accomplished this with the Divine grace, and with his good accord, namely his free choice and decision.

Relatively, let us hear what the Great Father of the Church St. Gregory of Nyssa says regarding the meaning of "accord"; "accord is this, the non-enslaved and self-dominant property of something, which is placed in the freedom of the intellect". This means that God cannot be held responsible for any malicious thing happening in any case, and therefore not of the personal sin of man. God does not tempt us, on the contrary He is the source of every good and perfect gift, as St. James the Brother of God teaches by saying: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:13-14).

Our Holy Father Moses is projected by the Church not only as an example of repentance but also as an example of the power of the accord, namely of the will for the overcoming of sins and the abstinence of our passions, through the weapons of fasting and prayer, as well as through the transposition of the intellect to things favourable for both mind (nous) and speech (logos).

Let us entreat our Father who is counted among the chorea of the saints, so that along with our Most Blessed Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, they may intercede to Christ our God to grant us the great mercy and the renewal of our souls and bodies. Amen.

And from the Holy Altar, we would like to express our warm wholehearted thanks to all those who worked for the renovation of the historic parish Church of St. Moses the Ethiopian, especially to the President of the Supreme Committee of Religious Affairs Mr. Ramzi Khury, who represents His Excellency the President of the Palestinian State Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, wishing him health and longevity and every governmental power through God. Many Happy Returns!"

During the meal offered at lunch time, by the Hegoumen and the Community Council, His Beatitude also said the following;

"I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Hebrews 2:12 / Psalm 22:23).

Your Excellency Mr. Ramzi Khoury, representative of His Excellency the President of the Palestinian State Mr. Mahmoud Abbas,

Honorable Members of the Church Council of the Rafidia Community,

Dear Fathers and Brothers, Noble Christians

Let us praise our Lord God, Who has deemed us worthy in this Eucharistic gathering to bless the recently renovated small, but historic Church of our Holy Father Moses the Ethiopian.

The renovation of this humble Church does not refer so much to its architectural value, as it does to the irrefutable witness of the centuries-old Christian and Apostolic legacy, and the ab-Antiquo presence of the primary Church of Christ, namely the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

The most beautiful and developing town of Rafidia has especial importance and this is so because it is incorporated within the historic and cultural frame of the wider district of the Biblical town of Nablus, with Jacob's well as a reference point, which is the birth town of St. Foteini, the Samaritan woman.

The indicated interest of the Palestinian Government in favour of the renovation and preservation of monuments and houses of worship without any distinction among the religious communities and the Christian Doctrines is a solid proof of the love and the good co-existence and co-habitation of the religious communities and of their equal treatment.

The Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, remaining stable and faithful in its God-sent mission, continues its ministry, namely the ministry of the safe-guarding of the All-holy shrines, of the care of its flock, and especially of the protection of the religious and cultural Status Quo of the Holy City of Jerusalem.

We take this opportunity in order to again express from the depths of our hearts our thanks to the President of the Church Committee and its respected members, the Hegoumen of Jacob's well, Reverend Archimandrite Ioustinos and your Spiritual Father, Reverend Archimandrite Leontios, and especially the representative of the President Mahmoud Abbas Dr. Ramzi Khoury, whose contribution is undoubtedly recognized above

all.

We wish health and the success in God to the ongoing God-pleasing work of your community. Amen.”

His Beatitude offered Mr. Ramzi Chury an icon of the Theotokos and a painting of Jerusalem to the other Palestinian representatives. Finally, the President of the Community Mr. Psiara Chury spoke, expressing his thanksgiving.

From Secretariat-General