

THE FEAST OF ST. GEORGE THE GREAT MARTYR IN LYDDA

On Saturday, November 3/16, 2019, the Patriarchate celebrated the feast of St. George the Great Martyr and Trophy-bearer at his holy Church in Lydda.

On this day the Church celebrates the translation of the relics of St. George from Rome where he suffered a martyr's death, in 4th century A.D., to his hometown Lydda, and of the consecration of the Church by St. Helen.

In this Holy Church, which the Patriarchate preserves as a shrine, H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem officiated the Divine Liturgy with the preceding warm welcome by the clergy. Co-celebrants to His Beatitude were the Most Reverend Archbishop Damascene of Joppa, the Most Reverend Archbishop and Secretary-General Aristarchos of Constantina, and the Most Reverend Metropolitan Elias of Filomiliou, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, and Archdeacon Mark. The chanting was delivered by Mr. Vasilios Gotsopoulos in Greek on the right and by the Community Choir in Arabic on the left, as the service was attended by representatives of the Greek Embassy in Israel and the Ambassadors of Serbia, England, Russia and Georgia, as well as a large congregation venerating the Saint's tomb.

His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon to this congregation;

"They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me" (John 16:2-3) Jesus Christ orders to those who believe in Him.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims

The Sacred commemoration of the consecration of the Church of the Holy Great Martyr George the Trophy-bearer in your historic biblical town of Lydda, namely the translation of his sacred relics, has gathered us all in order to glorify in Eucharist our Lord God, Who has glorified the martyr of love, the true sun of righteousness, His Only Begotten Son and our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. George was established as one of the great martyrs of Christ's love, having become participant of the cruciform and redeeming blood of Christ, as well as a communicant of the cloud of martyrs of the Church (Hebrews 12:1).

We refer to the Church because the mission of the Church in the world is the perfection of man in Christ. And this perfection in Christ is the aim and the expectation of Christ's friends, and of course of His martyrs. And this is so, because Christ, God the Word, is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end (Revelation 21:6), namely the salvation of the people, as He "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

Having been the son of noble Christian parents, from a Cappadocian father and a Palestinian mother, George was brought up according to the law of divine reverence, of the faith in Christ, and on the one hand he reached for "the knowledge of truth", while on the other, he desired the heavenly and eternal city, hearkening to St. Paul's words; "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13:14). "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Philip.

3:20-21).

Because of this, and having cleansed his mind with the light of the glorious gospel of God (2 Cor. 4:4), George who was known for his undefeated bravery as a grand commander of the Roman army, presented himself in the Roman Parliament before the cruel persecutor of the Christians Emperor Diocletian, and boldly stated himself to be a Christian and proclaimed Christ to be the God and the Son of God.

In other words, my dear ones, St. George denounced the fallacy of the false gods and of the idols, as well as the self-religion of the Roman Emperors who made themselves gods and sought to be worshiped by their subjects and citizens. In this case George proves himself to be a faithful witness of Christ's truth but also of the freedom of the people from the demonic religion of the idols as prophet-king David says; "For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens" (Psalm 96:4-5).

Today's honoured commemoration of St. George does not only refer to the historic place and time of his life and action, but also to our contemporary state of humanity and of the world, for which world, St. John the Evangelist says: "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life" (1 John 5:19-20) and he concludes; "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21), which means from the idolatrous notions and fallacies concerning God.

The innate and impulsive faith of St. George to the crucified

and resurrected Christ as well as his Godly zeal in favour of the teaching of Christ's gospel, state that he became a witness and fighter for the divine righteousness in Christ, as St. Paul preaches; "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17).

The Trophy-bearer George gained this righteousness becoming an imitator of Christ in both words and actions, hearkening to St. Paul's advice; "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). As it is known, St. Paul completed his apostolic preaching mission in Rome, with the martyr's blood of Christ's love.

The Holy Martyrs of the Church of Christ are the most selective and exquisite chorea of its saints. And this is so because by their confession of Christ as the real God, they have exchanged the glory of this world (1 Cor. 7:31) with the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Philip. 3:21).

Interpreting these words, St. Theodoritos says: "He said that our body has become of one accord with the body of His glory, not according to the measure of glory, but according to the quality. And this is also a luminous thing". And in more detail; the transformation of the holy martyrs' body underlines the change from the corrupt things to the incorrupt and from the lack of glory to glory itself" according to Zigavinos.

Behold therefore why the hymn writer of the Holy Great Martyr George says; "with the streams of thine own blood thou mightily didst quench the flame of delusion and error, destroying all the tyrants' pride, hereby glorifying Christ. From the right hand of the Most High hast thou therefore been given the crowns of life everlasting and of divine

incorruption”.

All of us who honour today the commemoration of George the brave Martyr, the preacher of truth, the defender of the poor and the healer of the sick, let us entreat him to intercede to our Lord God for the peace of our souls and the peace of our turbulent region.

Let us also beseech the Ever-Virgin Mary and Mother of God, the Most Blessed Theotokos to intercede to her Son and God and our Lord Jesus Christ, to guide our actions to a redeeming harbour and to the unwaning light which illumines the souls of the holy martyrs and of course of the Holy Great Martyr George the Trophy-bearer. Amen.”

After the Divine Liturgy, Hegoumen Archimandrite Nicodemus, who has worked on the preservation of the ikonostasion of the Church, offered a reception at the Community Club.

From Secretariat-General