

THE FEAST OF ST. CATHERINE AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Sunday November 25/ December 8, 2019, the Patriarchate celebrated the feast of Saint Catherine the Great Martyr and all-wise.

On this feast the Church commemorates St. Catherine, who was a very wise young lady from Alexandria, and with her faith in Christ and education, “with the Holy Spirit’s sword silenced brilliantly the clever among the godless” and suffered a martyr’s death for Christ performing wonders and miracles during the reign of Maxentius and Maximinus (305 A.D.).

The Patriarchate honoured the Great Martyr Catherine;

1. With the Divine Liturgy at the Holy Church of the Transfiguration of the Lord in Ramallah, which was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, and the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Archimandrite Kallistos, the Hegoumen of this Monastery Archimandrite Galaction, the ministering Priest of this parish Steward Fr. Jacob, Fr. Simeon and Archimandrite Seraphim from Nazareth, and Archdeacon Mark. The chanting was delivered by the parish choir in Arabic and the service was attended by a large Rum-Orthodox Arab-speaking congregation of this town.

His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon to this congregation;

“The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility” (Proverbs 15:33). [Reverence to God, the fear of God, turns the practical schooling into noble wisdom for the ones who receive the education. And the divine

schooling is followed by reward and glory] the wise Solomon says.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians

The sacred commemoration of the Holy Great Martyr Catherine has gathered us all today in this historic place, in the Church of the Transfiguration of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in order to honour in Eucharist the all-wise martyr of His love.

According to the historian Eusevius of Caesarea, St. Catherine was from Alexandria, the daughter of Konsta, a wonderful virgin, extremely wise in temperament, and glorious in wealth, family and education; with her fixed mindset, she defeated the passionate and evil soul of Maximus the tyrant from Alexandria. And with her eloquence she made speechless the orators and philosophers who initiated a debate with her. And because of her confession of Christ, she received the crown of martyrdom by our Saviour Jesus Christ, in the year 305 A.D. (Eccles. History 8:14).

Catherine the Great Martyr was distinguished among the women who martyred for Christ for her rare wisdom and education, which stemmed from the "divine fear", namely the deep faith in the true God and the keeping of His commandments, as the psalmist says; "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Psalm 103:17-18). "While the felt life is not ever-lasting, the mercy of the Lord is ever-lasting" Origen says. Commenting on the words; "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom" (Proverbs 15:33), St. Chrysostom says; "The fear of God perfects life both in its practical and theoretical aspect".

In other words, my dear brothers and sisters, reverence of

God, namely the fear of God is the foundation of the correct manner of living and of the human wisdom. For this, St. Paul says; "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:23-24).

This very armor of the divine strength and wisdom of God Word the Christ did the all-lauded Catherine put on, hearkening to St. Paul's advice; "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11).

Behold therefore why God's glory comes along with the wisdom and education of God, as St. Peter preaches; "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 5:4). The Great Martyr Catherine also received this "crown of glory that fadeth not away" as her hymn writer says; "Thou didst prove a voluntary Martyr, Catherine most glorious, when thou forcibly didst rebuke the tyrant, and didst convict the most grievous madness of polytheism, and by the light of grace divine and godly knowledge didst cast him to the ground. For which cause, Christ the Saviour of our souls, awarded the crown to thee as His witness in martyrdom and a virgin without reproach".

And we wonder, what kind and of what shape is the crown of glory with which St. Catherine was crowned? This crown of the glory of our God and Saviour Christ is no other than the participation of the righteous in the transfiguration of Jesus Christ, during which His face shone like the sun, and His raiment turned white as the light (Matt. 17:2).

In other words, the all-lauded Catherine, as another disciple of Christ, was deemed worthy to the vision of the glory of God, therefore she "now rejoices with the angelic choirs, with whom thou dost unceasingly cry: Bless Christ, O ye priests; supremely exalt Him, O ye people, unto the ages" the hymn writer says. And in His prayer, Jesus Christ prays to God the

Father for Himself, for His disciples the Apostles and for all who believe in Him saying: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

Interpreting the Lord's words; "that they may behold my glory" (John 17:24), St. Cyril of Alexandria says: "it will be not possible neither for the profane and sinners nor for those who dishonor the Law to behold the glory of Christ, but [it will be possible] only for the righteous and the benign ones. And we know this from the prophet who says "Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord" (Isaiah 26:10). And also in the gospel preaching of our Saviour Christ; "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8).

This purity of heart made the Ever-Virgin Mary a chosen vessel of the Holy Spirit, through which she became the Mother of God the Word and our Saviour Christ, Who was born of her pure blood in the cave of Bethlehem.

Our Holy Church is preparing us for this great and inconceivable event, the mystery of the Divine Providence of the incarnation of God the Word, in order to celebrate, paying heed to St. Paul's preaching; "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26-27).

Christ, my dear brothers and sisters, is the light of the world and the Sun of righteousness, therefore we, who bear His name, are called to put on the raiment of the light of the Sun of righteousness, which is Christ. Let us then prepare ourselves, so that the Sun of Righteousness and the light of knowledge may enter in the cave of our souls.

We are also called to this by today's celebrated Holy Great

Martyr Catherine, along with the Holy Great Martyr Mercurius, that we may imitate them, living a life in Christ in purity in all ways; and that we may say along with St. Paul; "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). Amen! Many happy returns and blessed Christmas!"

The Divine Liturgy was followed by the blessing of the water for the new halls of the parish, while the Hegoumen and the Council offered a meal to His Beatitude, who offered in turn a Cross to Archimandrite Galaction.

2. At the Holy Monastery dedicated to St. Catherine in the Old City, a stone's throw away from the Patriarchate, with Vespers in the afternoon and the Divine Liturgy on the morning of the feast, led by the Most Reverend Archbishop Demetrios of Lydda, with co-celebrants; Dragouman Archimandrite Mattheos and other Priests. The chanting was delivered by Monk Raphael and the services were attended by a noble congregation of local faithful and pilgrims.

After the Divine Liturgy the Hegoumen Archimandrite Stephen offered a reception.

3. At the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine in Sinai, where her sacred relic is kept.

For this feast a delegation was sent from the Patriarchate, led by the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis. The delegation arrived in the evening of the forefeast, participated in Vespers and at the Divine Liturgy in the All-night Vigil and returned to Jerusalem on Sunday evening.

From Secretariat-General