

THE FEAST OF ST. NICHOLAOS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

1. The Feast of St. Nicholaos in Beit Jalla

On Thursday, December 6/19, 2019, the Patriarchate celebrated the commemoration of our Father among the Saints Nicholaos, Bishop of Myra in Lycia the wonder worker at his magnificent Church of the Rum Orthodox Arab-speaking Community of Beit Jalla, near Bethlehem.

St. Nicholaos is the Father of the Church of the 4th century, Bishop of Myra in Lycia, protector of the poor, those who suffer injustice, the prisoners and needy, “a rule of faith and an icon of meekness, a teacher of temperance”, protector of the sailor men, vary popular to the Orthodox people, defender also of the Orthodox doctrine of the One Essence of the Son to the Father in the 1st Ecumenical Synod of Nice in 325 A.D.

This great Hierarch was honoured by the Rum Orthodox Arab-speaking Community of Beit Jalla and all the town as its Patron Saint, with the Divine Liturgy which was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Most Reverend Archbishop Methodios of Tabor and the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, the Hegoumen Archimandrite Ignatios, Archimandrite Alexios, the Ministering Priests of the Church, Steward Fr. George Awad, Fr. Paul, Fr. Yusef and Fr. Elias and Hierodeacon Eulogios. The Liturgy was attended by the full congregation of the Orthodox faithful of the town, the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos, the representatives of the Palestinian Autonomy, the President of the Ecclesiastical issues Committee Mr. Ramzi Hourri and the

Mayor Mr. Nichola Hamis.

His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon to this Congregation:

“With what fair songs of sweet melody shall we praise the all-venerable hierarch? That most potent foe of impiety and the defender of piety, distinguished among the Church leaders; the might and great protector and instructor of all, who putteth to shame all holding a false belief; who fought with Arius fiercely, proving his destroyer, and through whom his arrogant pride hath been overthrown by Christ, Who granteth great mercy to the world” the hymn writer proclaims.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims

The fortifying grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us all in this Church dedicated to Bishop Nickolas of Myra in Lycia, who was also a pilgrim in the Holy Land, in order to festively celebrate his commemoration.

On Holy Father among the Saints Nicholaos lived during the reign of the Emperor Constantine the Great. He was born in Patara of Asia Minor and participated in the 1st Ecumenical Synod of Nice along with the other Holy Fathers, in the year 325, with which they condemned the heretic Arius and his teaching. St. Nicholaos was a fervent supporter of St. Athanasius the Great, who stated in precision the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. St. Nickolas slept in the Lord around the year 330 A.D.

Paying heed to St. Paul’s words; “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” (Phil. 3:20-21), St. Nicholaos was proven a true healer of Christ and a preacher of the gospel, and for his extreme virtue he received the sacred

office of High Priesthood, and became a spiritual shepherd, as the Archbishop of the county of Myra in Lycia.

Describing the distinguished personality of St. Nicholas, the hymn writer says; "Let us now praise the hierarch in song, that shepherd and teacher in Myra, that by his intercessions we may receive illumination, O ye people. For behold, being undefiled in spirit, he was altogether a source of purification, offering to Christ that sacrifice that is pure and without blemish and acceptable unto God, since he himself, as a priest, was made pure in soul and body. Wherefore, he is truly a protector and a champion of the Church, as a great initiate of the divine grace of God".

Indeed, my dear brothers and sisters, St. Nicholas is a protector and defender of the Church as well as of its salvific teaching, that is why he is called "rule of the right faith", for which he fought vigorously, both in words and in actions, according to the advice of St. Jude: "Beloved, ... it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). The "saints" in this case are the Christians who received the healthy faith through the oral preaching once and for all.

This healthy faith is the one which calls us to fight the good fight for the salvation of our souls as St. Paul writes to his disciple Timothy, saying: "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:12). Our Father among the Saints Nicholas also laid hold of the "eternal life", whose fame spread out to the whole world, remaining vivid up to the present, according to the words of the psalmist: "Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (Psalm 19:4).

The sacred commemoration of St. Nicholas the wonder worker has gathered us in this Eucharistic meeting so that we may

honour him on the one hand, and thank our "Holy Lord God" on the other, who has given us the holy worker of His vineyard, namely of the Church of Christ. The good and faithful worker of Christ's vineyard was glorified by God the Father in the heavenly life, where he intercedes for our souls in boldness.

Our Holy Father Nicholaos who was proven a man of God and a chosen vessel, urges us through the mouth of the Chief Apostle Peter to a life worthy of God's benefits by saying; "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:14-16).

In other words, my dear brothers and sisters, St. Nicholaos is a visible and living example of the genuine Christian, within whom Christ's character was formed. Precisely this forming of Christ within us is what St. Paul in agony urges us to accomplish by saying; "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. 4:19).

The "metropolis of the feasts" the great feast of Christmas is about to grant us this forming of Christ in us, namely the spiritual regeneration, in the neighbouring city of Bethlehem, as the hymn writer of the Church says; "Make ready, O Bethlehem; let the manger be prepared, let the cave show its welcome. The Truth is come, the shadow is passed away; God hath appeared from a Virgin unto men, formed as we are, and deifying that which He hath assumed. Wherefore, Adam is renewed with Eve, as they cry out: Thy good will hath appeared on earth to save our race".

The revelation through Mary the Theotokos of God to the people, who took our form and deified our human nature, is being preached and evangelized by the Holy Church of Christ, through its honoured Bishop Nicholaos the wonder worker. This great mystery of the gospel (Eph. 6:19) are we called to

celebrate, not in a worldly, social and material manner, but spiritually and worshipfully, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all (Christian) saints" (Eph. 6:18) as St. Paul preaches.

And along with the hymn writer let us say; "As thou standest before the throne of God, cease not to intercede earnestly for us all, thy faithful servants, O wise and wondrous Nicholaos, that we be delivered from the eternal fire and from the wicked counsel and ill-dealing of our enemies". Amen! Blessed Christmas!"

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a meal at lunch time, offered by the Hegoumen Archimandrite Ignatios and the Community Council at the Orient Palace Hotel.

2. The Feast of St. Nicholaos at St. Savvas' Lavra

St. Nicholaos was honoured also at his Church in the Lavra of St. Savvas, the first Church built in the Lavra, with the Divine Liturgy in an All-night Vigil, which was led by the Archbishop in turn, Most Reverend Philoumenos of Pella, with the participation of St. Savvas' and the Hagiotaphite Fathers and pilgrims.

3. The Feast of St. Nicholaos in Jerusalem

The Feast of St. Nicholaos was also celebrated in his Holy Monastery in the Old City of Jerusalem. Vespers in the afternoon and the Divine Liturgy on the morning of the feast were led by the Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod Most Reverend Archbishop Demetrios of Lydda, with co-celebrants the Archimandrites Mattheos and Demetrios, Archdeacon Mark and Deacon Sophronios, with the participation in prayer of a congregation from Jerusalem and Monks and Nuns of the Patriarchate.

After the Divine Liturgy the Caretaker of the Holy Monastery

Archdeacon Mark offered a rich reception to the Episcopal Entourage and all present at the Hegoumeneion and the courtyard of the Monastery.

From Secretariat-General