

HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS CELEBRATES THE DIVINE LITURGY IN BETHANY

On Sunday, May 18/31, 2020, Sunday of the commemoration of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Synod, who condemned Arius and established the doctrine of the one essence of the Son with the Father, and formulated the first eight canons of the Creed, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, in place of the cancelled due to COVID-19 virus festive celebration of Lazarus' Saturday, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Holy Monastery of Lazarus' sisters Martha and Mary. Co-celebrants to His Beatitude were the Most Reverend Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, Archimandrite Epiphaniios, who is the ministering Priest of the Holy Monastery, Archimandrite Demetrios and Archdeacon Mark, at the chanting of Mr Vasilios Gotsopoulos.

On this occasion, His Beatitude read the following Sermon:

“O ye assemblies of the Orthodox, let us celebrate today with faith and piety the annual memorial of the God-bearing Fathers who, in the illustrious city of Nicaea, came together from the whole inhabited world. For with pious mind, they refuted the godless dogma of the grievous Arius, and by synodical decree banished him from the Catholic Church. And they instructed all to openly confess the consubstantial and co-eternal Son of God, Who existed before the ages. This inexactness and piety did they set forth in the Symbol of Faith. Wherefore, following their divine doctrines and believing with assurance, we worship, in one Godhead, the Father, the Son and All-holy Spirit, the Trinity one in essence” the hymn-writer of the Church proclaims (Vespers of the Holy Fathers, Stichera,

Glory).

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians

Today, the seventh Sunday since Easter, we celebrate the First Ecumenical Synod in Nicaea of the three hundred and eighteen God-bearing Fathers, who gathered there from all over the earth after the inspired by the Holy Spirit decision of the Emperor St. Constantine the Great, in the twentieth year of his reign. And we offer this bloodless sacrifice in Eucharist to our Trinitarian God in this Holy place of His sanctification.

The Holy Fathers of the Church are the descendants of the Holy Apostles and the guardians of the Holy Apostolic tradition, namely of the redeeming teaching of the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle", St. Paul urges us (2 Thess. 2:15).

And the Fathers, who are called "God-bearing", namely bearers of the Holy Spirit, are those who on the one hand were ordained by the Church (2 Cor. 8:19), and on the other, through their mission and teaching were established Spiritual Fathers of the faithful members of the body of the Church, as St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel"(1 Cor. 4:15).

In other words, the God-inspired Fathers of the Church are the bearers of the unadulterated and healthy teaching of the faith, which they formulated in the doctrines and entrenched through the holy canons in the various Ecumenical and local Synods. For this reason, they are recognized as ecumenical teachers and luminaries as their hymn writer says: "When the choir of the Holy Fathers flocked from the ends of the

inhabited world, they proclaimed the doctrine of the One Essence and One Nature of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, thereby delivering plainly to the Church the mystery of theology. As we acclaim them in faith, let us call them blessed, saying: O divine array, ye God-proclaiming hoplites of the Lord's company, most brilliant stars of the spiritual firmament, impregnable towers of the mystical Sion, ye fragrant flowers of Paradise, ye all-golden mouths of the Word, the boast of Nicaea and adornment of the whole world: Intercede ye fervently in behalf of our souls" (Matins, praises, Glory).

Here the hymn writer calls the Holy Fathers "all-golden mouths of God the Word". And this is so because they established the doctrine of the mystery of theology, which refers to the one essence and one nature of the persons of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Moreover, they formed the doctrine of the Divine Providence, which refers to the incarnation of God the Word, Christ, from the pure flesh of the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. And according to St. Gregory the Theologian, they accomplished this, thinking "not in the manner of Aristotle, but in that of the fishermen". And according to the hymn writer: "Since Christ's heralds had received all of the spiritual brightness of the Holy Spirit's light and had been inspired of God, they proclaimed to all that divine oracle filled with wondrous wisdom, which though few in words is great in breadth"(Matins praises, stichera of the Fathers, Troparion 2).

In other words, the formation of the holy doctrines of our faith by the Church Fathers has its source of inspiration in the revealed truth in Jesus Christ, namely this very revelation of God toward men, in the incarnate Son of His and Word, which was made complete and is eternally unchangeable, and for which it is said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away"(Mark 13:31).

On the contrary, the heretics' formation of the faith in

Christ has their own mind as its source, namely the “cunningly devised fables”(2 Peter 1:16), and their distorted thoughts, according to what has been foretold by St. Paul: “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them”(Acts 20: 29-30).

Such “men speaking perverse things” were the unrepentant heretics, Arius, who denied the divinity of Jesus Christ, Macedonius, the fighter of the Spirit, and Nestorius, who introduced the division of God-man Christ. And the teachings of the other false teachers, old and new alike, is connected directly or indirectly with the aforementioned heretics.

Behold my brethren why, our Holy Church festively honours its “all-golden mouths”, namely the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Synod in Nicaea in 325 A.D. As direct descendants of the Apostles, “being reviled, buffeted and persecuted, and driven into exile”(1 Cor. 4-11-13), the Holy Fathers became “true servants of Christ and venerable initiates and seers of the divine preaching from on high” according to the hymn writer (Matins, praises, Troparion 3).

Along with the Holy God-bearing Fathers, who proclaimed the Ever-Virgin and Most Blessed Mary as Theotokos and Mother of God, and the hymn writer, let us say: “Beholding Thine ascents on the holy mountains, O Christ, Thou Effulgence of the Father’s glory, we praise the radiant form of Thy countenance. We worship Thy Passion, we honour Thy Resurrection, and we glorify Thy glorious Ascension. Have mercy on us” (Sunday of the Holy Fathers Vespers, both now).

And deliver Your world from the plague of the COVID-19 virus. Amen. Many Happy returns and health in Christ!”

At noon, the elder and devoted Abbess Nun Eupraxia and the nuns under her offered a meal to His Beatitude and His

entourage.

From Secretariat-General