

THE FEAST OF OUR HOLY FATHER ONUPHRIUS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Thursday, June 12/25, 2020, the Patriarchate celebrated the commemoration of our Holy Father Onuphrius the Egyptian at his Holy Monastery, which is located at the place of “the Potter’s field” which was bought by the Pharisees with the thirty silver coins Judas returned to them (Matt. 21:30), opposite Siloam’s pool.

In this Holy Church, which is mainly carved into a rock, dedicated to Saint Onuphrius, who lived in Egypt in the 4th century, in complete silence, prayer, fasting and strict asceticism, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos officiated the Divine Liturgy, with co-celebrants their Eminences Archbishops Aristarchos of Constantina and Aristovoulos of Madaba, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacon Eulogios. The chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon, and the service was attended by faithful Christians, monks, nuns and pilgrims from our Greek-speaking and Arab-speaking flock.

His Beatitude read the following Sermon to his congregation:

“Ye sought to behold the delight of the Lord, O God-bearer, and with Him alone did ye long to converse alone. Wherefore, ye abandoned the world, fleeing afar off to dwell in the wilderness and in mountains and putting on Christ, ye took no raiment, for ye had trafficked for the garment of incorruption, wherewith ye entered into the heavenly bridechamber, where ye rejoice eternally, O Onuphrius” (Menaion June 12, Glory of praises) the Church melodist proclaims.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians

The grace of the Holy Spirit which made our Holy Father Onuphrius a citizen of the desert, an Angel in the flesh and a wonderworker, has gathered us all in his Holy Monastery which is located at the "field of blood"(Matt. 27:8), in order to festively celebrate his commemoration.

Hearkening to David's words, "Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day"(Psalm 25:4-5), he departed the Coenobion where he lived as a monk, in Hermoupolis of Thebes in Egypt and retreated in the desert, where he lived for sixty years without setting eyes on any human being, having as prototypes to imitate Prophet Elijah and St. John the Baptist.

The ascetic life of St. Onuphrius in the desert made him a vessel of the Holy Spirit, as his hymnographer says: "As angel in the flesh who dwelt with the hosts incorporeal, ye lit the desert like stars flashing in the night with your ascetic pains and toils Onuphrius, crying out loud: Alleluia"(Kontakion).

Our Holy Father Onuphrius managed his dwelling with the Angels because he sought the truth, the righteousness and the true light since his childhood, virtues that have been revealed to men by the Father through His Only-Begotten Son and Word and the Holy Spirit: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life"(John 8:12), "seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness"(Matt. 6:33), "ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"(John 8:32) the Lord says.

In other words, the God-inspired words of both the Old and the New Testament, of the Gospel, became a manner of living and of ascesis for Saint Onuphrius, who considered the Lord the source of life, according to the psalmist: "in thy light shall

we see light”(Psalm 36:9). “For Christ is both the source of life and the light of light” Saint Athanasios the Great says.

Through the ascetic striving, our Father Onuphrius managed the desirable and perfect thing, to become communicant of the uncreated actions of God, namely someone who beheld and put on himself the uncreated divine light, and became a co-heir of the glory of Christ, as the hymnographer says: “offering thy mind as a whole-burnt offering, thou worthily becamest a partaker and joint heir in His glory”(Minaion Ode 5, troparion 1). And elsewhere, “Glory-wise Father Onuphrius...mortifying thy members on the earth, thou didst attain to the life in Heaven’s heights, where with great joy, O Saint, thou within the bridal chamber dost behold thy Creator’s artless beauty, O most righteous one”(Vespers troparion 2).

The vision of the “artless beauty” was accomplished by Saint Onuphrius through the virtue of “the ineffable purity and chastity, which the corrupt men acquire after many hardships, striving and sweat” according to Saint John of the Ladder. “For conquering one’s nature is beyond hope. In any case where the nature was defeated, there the incorruption of the supernatural was revealed” Saint John says again, “And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better”(Hebrews 7:7).

In other words, Saint Onuphrius is distinguished among the great ascetics of the desert in the Church, because he managed the perfect renewal of man in Christ, the perfect God and perfect man, and transformed his corrupt nature by mortifying his own will, subduing himself unto the will of Christ Who said: “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother”(Matt. 12:50). “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day”(John 6:40).

It is also noteworthy, that the renewal of man is impossible without Christ, because “without me ye can do nothing”(John 15:5) the Lord says. Because of this the hymnographer says: “the Word of God that came from God, seeking by His ineffable wisdom to renew Adam, who fell into corruption through food, and was incarnate in an unspeakable manner through the Holy Virgin for our sakes, let us all faithful magnify in praise” (Heirmos ode 9).

By the above, it is made clear that the spiritual struggle for the deification in Christ does not only refer to the human nature, namely the soul, but also to the body; and this is so, because “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us”(John 1:14) according to the Scriptures.

The life in Christ of today’s honoured Saint Onuphrius who became an Angel in the flesh and a wonderworker, proves that our Lord Jesus Christ is the light of the redeeming truth. Let us thus say along with the hymnographer: “Blessed art thou, O Onuphrius, having worked for Christ and vanquished the power of the enemy, a co-citizen of the Angels, joint to the Righteous and Holy, with whom thou intercedeth to God to have mercy on our souls” (Minaion Glory of Vespers stichera). Amen.”

After the Dismissal there was a procession to the founders’ grave, the prayer of the fruit was read, and the Trisagion for Nun Seraphima who used to live in the monastery was also held.

Finally, the good keeper of the Monastery, Abbess Paissia hosted a reception for the Patriarchal entourage and all present at the courtyard of the Monastery and the Hegoumeneion.

From Secretariat-General