

THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Wednesday, August 6/19, 2020, the Patriarchate celebrated the feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ.

On this day the Church following the Gospel narratives (Matt. 17: 1-3, Luke 9: 28-36, Mark 9: 2-13) commemorates the event when a little while before His Passion on the Cross, our Lord Jesus Christ appeared in His divine glory and light, when His raiment became white and brighter than the light and the voice of God the Father was heard saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him", before the chosen Disciples, Peter, James, and John, in order to show them and to us the former beauty that man lost, which those who believe in Him are able to restore being transfigured in Him and by Him.

This event was celebrated:

1. At Mount Tabor, in the Holy Church of the Holy Transfiguration of the Lord, where His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos officiated the All-night Vigil, with co-celebrants their Eminences; Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, and Deacons, with the participation of only a few faithful Christians due to COVID-19. The chanting was delivered by Archimandrite Demetrios Kavathas on the right in Greek and by Archimandrite Philotheos on the left in Arabic.

Before the Holy Communion, His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“Christ took Peter, James, and John into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them; and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light. And there appeared Moses and Elias talking with Him. And a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said: This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him” (Matins, end, glory) the hymnographer of the Church proclaims, using the wording of the narrative according to St. Matthew (Matt. 17:1-5).

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians

Today the Saviour of our souls, “Who wast transfigured making the nature that was darkened in Adam to shine like lightning again” (Vespers aposticha Troparion 2) has gathered us in this Holy Mount of Tabor in order to mystically see through the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, Christ, shining with the divine rays and hear the voice of God the Father proclaiming Him His Beloved Son, Who has redeemed us from our human illness.

In this Holy high mountain, where Christ was transfigured before His disciples, and His face shone like the sun, and His raiment became white as light (Matt. 17:2), the irreproachable light of the glory of God the Father was foreshadowed. For this, the hymnographer says: “The darkness of the Law hath been superseded by the luminous cloud of the Transfiguration. Moses and Elias, being found therein and deemed worthy of the glory that transcendeth light, said unto God: Thou art our God, the King of ages”(Small Vespers glory, both now).

The only and absolute purpose of the mystery of the Divine Providence, namely of our faith to the incarnate Son and Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, is for us to be deemed worthy of the glory of the transcendeth light of God. And what is this glory of God? It is written: “And the sight of the glory

of the Lord was like devouring fire" (Exodus 24:17). And elsewhere, the Lord said to Elisha the Thesbite: "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by... but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire, a still small voice" and the Lord was there (3 Kings 19:11-12).

And according to the witness of St. John the Evangelist, the Lord is the light of the world: "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, 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). And this light is no other than the glory of God, as St. Luke the Evangelist says, referring to the shepherds who kept watch at night: "And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them" (Luke 2:9), and at Stephen's stoning to death: "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55-56).

The event of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ is the foreshadowing of His Resurrection, the preparation of the Disciples for it, who were going to be the eye-and-ear witnesses of the Passion, the death on the Cross, the three-day burial, and of course of the luminous Resurrection of Christ, as St. Matthew narrates: "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Matt. 16:21). This is also witnessed by the hymn-writer of the Church by saying: "Before Thy Cross, O Lord, a mountain became like unto Heaven, and a cloud spread out like a tabernacle. When Thou wast transfigured and the Father bare witness to Thee, Peter with James and John were present, for they also were to be with Thee at the time of Thy betrayal; so

that having seen Thy wonders, they might not be afraid at Thy sufferings"... "to show them the splendour of the Resurrection"(Great Vespers troparia 1&2).

The theological depth, height, and width of the miracle of Christ's Transfiguration is centered in two things: Firstly that Christ: "was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (Matt. 17:2) and secondly: "a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him"(Matt. 17:5).

And we say this because the experience of both the vision of the glow of the light of the Transfiguration and the hearing of the voice in the cloud is not solely directed towards the present Disciples, but also to every single faithful Christian who loves God with all his clean mind and heart. Let us therefore hear the words of the established Church Father Gregory Palamas in his approved teaching by the great God-bearing and Theologian Fathers before him: "The chosen ones among the Disciples, as you hear the Church chanting, ..., saw the meaningful and eternal beauty of God in Tabor... the luminous brightness of the initial beauty, this divine beauty that has never been seen,, through which man becomes deified and deemed worthy of conversing with the Divine, this eternal and heirless Kingdom of God, this irreproachable light beyond comprehension, a boundless, timeless, eternal light, shining incorruptibility, God's light to the deified...for the grace of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit was one, which was not visible to the human eyes, but it pierced through them as if opening the eyes of blind men, and made them able to see, according to St. John Damascene, this uncreated light, which in the age to come will only be visible to the saints, as Saints Dionysios and Maximus say".

This uncreated light of the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ shone upon this Holy Mount of Tabor, and for this

reason, it is also called the light of Tabor. The Saints and the Righteous of God are worthy of this light as it is written: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"(Matt. 5:8). "For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light"(Psalm 36:9) David chants.

As for us, my dear Brethren, let us entreat God the Word and God the Father of lights that by the intercessions of the Most Blessed Theotokos we also may praise Him and say along with the Psalmist: "In the light of the glory of Thy face shall we walk unto the ages"(Psalm 88:15). Amen."

After the Divine Liturgy, the renovator of the Monastery and Hegoumen Archimandrite Ilarion offered a fish meal.

2. At Gethsemane and the Tomb of Theotokos, the Divine Liturgy was led by His Eminence Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias with the co-celebration of Hagiotaphite Fathers. After the Divine Liturgy, the Hegoumen Archbishop Dorotheos of Avela offered a reception.
3. In Ramallah, at the Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Lord, the Divine Liturgy was led by the Hegoumen Archimandrite Galaktion, with co-celebrant the Steward and Priest Yacub, with the participation of a few faithful only due to the virus pandemic.

From Secretariat-General