

THE FEAST OF THE RETURN OF THE RELICS OF SAINT SAVVAS THE SANCTIFIED AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Monday, October 13/26, 2020, the Patriarchate celebrated the commemoration of the return of the sacred relics of our Holy Father Savvas the Sanctified.

On this Feast the Church of Jerusalem commemorates the event of October 13/26, 1965, when it received the relics of Saint Savvas the Sanctified back from Venice, where the Crusaders had taken it.

The church of Jerusalem asked for the return of the Saint one year after the lifting of the 'anathemas' of 1050, in the year 1964, and after the visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras and of Pope John Paul VI in the Holy Land. In order to escort the relics, a Delegation from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem went to Venice, members of which were the memorable Metropolitans Vasilios of Caesarea, and Germanos of Petra, the memorable Spiritual Father of the Monastery of Saint Savvas Archimandrite Seraphim, the memorable Hegoumen of the Monastery of Martha and Mary in Bethany, Archimandrite Theodosios, and the then Deacon – and at present – Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth.

The welcoming reception of the sacred relics was held at Jaffa Gate in much joy, gladness and thanksgiving, and from there, it was taken to the Catholicon of the All-Holy Church of the Resurrection for a week-long veneration, to conclude to his Holy Monastery founded by Saint Savvas himself, and where it is kept ever since, as a treasure of a fountain of power, and every kind of help.

For the commemoration of this event on the aforementioned date, an All-night Vigil was celebrated at the Saint's Monastery, officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants their Eminences; Geronda Secretary-General, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Patriarchal Representative in Bethlehem, Theophylactos of Jordan, Aristovoulos of Madaba (as the Archbishop in turn for this year), Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, among whom were the Archimandrites Ignatios, Mattheos and Niphon, Arab-speaking Priests from Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacon Eulogios. The chanting was delivered by the Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod Hierodeacon Simeon in Greek, with the help of His Eminence Aristovoulos, and by the Acre choir under the lead of Archimandrite Philotheos in Arabic. The service was attended by members of our Arab-speaking flock from the neighbouring Bethlehem District.

His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon to the Fathers and the congregation:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30), the Lord says.

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Our Holy Church of Jerusalem honours and venerates today the return to the sacred incorrupt relics of Saint Savvas the Sanctified back to his famous Lavra (on October 26, 1965), from Venice, paying heed to the Biblical words: “The memory of the just is blessed”(Proverbs 10:7), or in other words, the remembrance of the just is pleasant and eternal even after death.

Savvas from Cappadocia longed for the rest of his soul and

like another deer retreated to the ascetic and spiritual fountains of the Judea desert in Palestine, where he was schooled by the desert Teachers, Theoctistos and Euthymius the Great.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29). Interpreting these words of the Lord, Saint Gregory of Nyssa says: “by the word: ‘yoke’ [Christ] means the working of the commandments, let us then obey the commander, let us become the beast of burden, clothing ourselves with the yoke of love”. And commentator Zigavinos says: “He didn’t say only the word ‘humble’ (lowly), but ‘lowly in heart’, meaning humble in ones’ soul, by one’s free will”.

The approved Church Father, Gregory of Nyssa correctly interprets that we are called to clothe ourselves with the yoke of Christ’s love. And this is so, because according to Saint John of the Ladder, love, in its essence, is the source of faith. And according to Saint John Damascene, “Faith is to agree without much examining. Faith is to believe that everything was created by God from non-being into being; and every single thing, both divine and human, can be accomplished by faith”.

The fundamental importance of faith is phrased clearly by Saint Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians: “For this, cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..., that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Eph. 3:14-17). Moreover, Saint John the Theologian preaches: “this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

Our Holy Father Savvas accomplished this very thing; meaning the dwelling of Christ in his heart through faith. For this reason, he would say along with the psalmist: “As for me, I

will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15). And to make it clearer; I will work Your righteousness and with it, I shall behold Your Face [Lord], while my soul will be satisfied when I see the glory, the brightness of Your Face. Moreover, Saint Savvas followed Saint Paul's order: "Put on the whole armour of God...having on the breastplate of righteousness" (Ephesians 6: 11, 14). For this reason, he lives eternally in the fragrant and incorrupt relics that we have before our eyes, as the Wisdom of Solomon says: "But the righteous live for ever, and their reward is with the Lord; the Most-High takes care of them. Therefore, they will receive a glorious crown and a beautiful diadem from the hand of the Lord, because with his right hand he will cover them, and with his arm, he will shield them" (Wisdom of Solomon 5:15-16). And in more detail, the righteous live eternally, and their reward is in the hands of the Lord. For this reason, they will receive the glorious Kingdom of Heaven by the Lord.

Let us hear Saint Paul preaching in his Epistle to the Romans: "I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness" (Romans 6:19). In other words, just as you offered your body parts as servants to sin, which makes a man unclean and an offender, so as to commit the iniquity, likewise, you should now offer your bodies as servants to the virtuous manner of living, in order to advance in holiness. "[Paul means] as righteousness the virtuous manner of living...*leading* to sanctification, instead of being sanctified" Zigavinos explains.

According to Saint Basil the Great, "sanctification is to devote ones' life to God completely". And according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa: "For Christ is God's righteousness, which is revealed by the Gospel, as the Apostle says (Romans 1:17) ... and because the Son is the Father's power, all the works of

the Son are the Father's works".

It is made clear that the sanctification for us who confess Christ crucified and resurrected, presupposes God's righteousness according to the Lord's advice: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). In addition, this holds a prominent place in the Lord's prayer: "After this manner, therefore, pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:9-10).

Let us, therefore, hear Saint Paul's advice, which refers to all Christians, and especially to us who minister at the Life-giving sacraments of Christ, and to the Monks who live in spiritual asceticism in the desert and dry land: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:1-4).

Commenting on these words, Saint Gregory of Nyssa says: "Do not gaze upon the earthly things, but upon the heavenly ones, where Christ is ... live also, in order to see God, not for the purpose of prolonging your life on earth, nor in order to have a beastly pleasure, but in order to accomplish the heavenly citizenship".

To this cause we are also called, my dear Brethren, to bring to perfection our life in Christ, thus become citizens of the "ever-lasting" city of heaven and fellow citizens of the Saints of God and our Saviour Christ in heaven, because, as Saint Paul preaches: "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13:14). Amen. Many happy returns."

After the All-night Vigil, there was a reception with boiled wheat, bread and sweet wine, followed by a common meal which His Beatitude blessed.

Blessing the Fathers, His Beatitude departed via the Holy Monastery of Saint Theodosios the Cenobiarch for veneration, according to the customary tradition.

From Secretariat-General