

HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS CELEBRATES THE D. LITURGY ON SARANTARION MOUNT

On Sunday 25 January / 7 February 2021, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos officiated the Divine Liturgy on the commemoration of our Holy Father Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople, at the Holy Monastery of Sarantarion Mount.

This Mount is dominant over the city of Jericho, with its foot at the waters of Prophet Elisha. According to the faith of our Church, the Lord was guided by the Spirit on this Mount after His baptism in the River Jordan, where He accepted to be tempted by the demon according to the Holy Evangelists (Matthew Ch. 4, Mark Ch. 1, Luke Ch. 4), and He conquered every temptation after forty-day fasting, setting an example for us to fight and conquer our temptations.

This Divine Liturgy was also celebrated on the commemoration of the fact that many Fathers, great ascetics and other monks followed the Lord's example, and used to retreat to the desert after the Feast of Theophany, living in asceticism until Palm Sunday, when they returned to their Monasteries, chanting: "today the grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us..."

Co-celebrants to His Beatitude were their Eminences; Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, and Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios. The chanting was delivered by His Eminence Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba, and only a few monks attended the Service.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians

The grace of the Holy Spirit, which came down in the form of a dove and stood above Jesus Christ when He was baptized in the Jordan, has gathered us in his holy place, where Jesus was guided by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil, in order to celebrate the bloodless sacrifice and glorify His Holy Name.

According to the true witness of the Evangelists, after His baptism and the temptations, Jesus “departed into Galilee... he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw a great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:12-17).

These words: “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17) are still being preached by the Holy Church of Christ, addressing every man who seeks the light of truth, namely of Christ, Who said: “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).

Interpreting these words, Saint Chrysostom says: “He talks about light and darkness in a noetic manner; meaning that one does not remain in fallacy and in sin”. And Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: “The one who follows Christ does not remain in the darkness at all, but will gain the light of life”. The one that hears my teaching, the Lord says, will not walk in darkness, but will be led to the light of life, namely to the revelation of the mysteries regarding Me, which will lead to the eternal life.

The approaching of the Kingdom of Heaven is no other than the revelation of the divine providence to the world, "and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hidden in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:9-10).

In other words, Christ, according to Origen, is the "Self-Kingdom". "For He [Christ] is the King of heavens, and just as He is the self-wisdom, self-righteousness, and self-truth, likewise, He is the self-kingdom". This means that the Kingdom of Christ, who is the head of the Church body, is present, and therefore at hand, near us in the Church; and through both the earthly and the heavenly Church, or better say, "the militant and triumphant". "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off" (Jeremiah 23:23)? And according to the psalmist: "Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth" (Ps. 119:151).

Our entrance and participation in the body of the Church [of Christ] through the holy baptism, denotes our familiarity to the Kingdom of God according to the testimony of Luke the Evangelist; "And when he was demanded of the Pharisees when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20-21).

Interpreting these words of the Lord, Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: "it is in our self-will and in our power to take it [the kingdom]; it is, therefore, imperative for every man to have the justification in Christ through faith, namely to enrich and adorn himself with every virtue in order to gain the kingdom of heaven". And in more detail; it is up to your own will and power to gain the kingdom. Because every man who achieves the righteousness through faith in Christ, and is adorned with all virtues, is therefore deemed worthy of the

kingdom of heaven. And Saint Theophylaktos says: "It is only then that God reigns within us when no worldly thing possesses our souls, but we live in a manner beyond this world for all things".

Moreover, Saint Mark, the ascetic says on this matter: "it is necessary to have the grace of the Holy Spirit acting in the heart, and according to this analogy one may enter the kingdom of heaven". Commenting on these words, Metropolitan Joel of Edessa says: "this means that the one who has the grace of the Holy Spirit working in his heart, has entered the Kingdom of God according to the degree of cultivating this. In other words, the one who does the will of God cleanses his mind and heart, distances himself from sin, lives in God, while he still is on earth".

And we have this example from the Saints of our Church. And we say this because the worldly life of the Saints is the life that reveals Christ Himself, His Kingdom. Filled with divine love, the Saints of the Church of Christ are those who paid heed to Saint Paul's voice: "having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23). "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).

As for us, my dear brethren, let us entreat God the Word and our Saviour, who was made incarnate through the Virgin Mary and appeared to us, to deem us worthy of His Kingdom, saying: "Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven". Amen."

After the Divine Liturgy, the Hegoumen Archimandrite Onuphrios hosted a reception for the Patriarchal Entourage.

From Secretariat-General