

# THE FEAST OF SAINT GERASIMUS OF THE JORDAN AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Thursday of the 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Lent, 5/18 March 2021, the Patriarchate celebrated by transference the commemoration of our Holy Father Gerasimus of the Jordan at his Holy Monastery, in the desert of the river Jordan, at a short distance from the river's estuaries towards the Dead Sea, on the West Bank.

This Monastery was founded by Saint Gerasimus when he came to the Holy Land from his hometown Lycia of Asia Minor, at the time of the Monophysites' turbulences in AD 451.

For a short while Saint Gerasimus was influenced by the Monophysites' groups, but Saint Euthymius the Great returned him to the Orthodox faith and since then they co-operated and Saint Gerasimus became an enlightened spiritual guide in this Monastery. The Monastery was a Coenobium and a Lavra at the same time with thousands of Monks and laity, and the Saint was granted by God the gifts of healing, wonder-working and clairvoyance, as well as the grace to tame wild animals, a fact that is depicted in his icon with the lion.

In this Monastery the Divine Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts was celebrated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos with co-celebrants their Eminences; Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Elder Dragoman Archimandrite Mattheos, Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacon Eulogios. The chanting was delivered by His Eminence Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba and Hierodeacon Simeon. The service was attended by the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras and only a few faithful due to covid-19 restrictions.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“The righteous man shall flourish like a palm tree, and like a cedar in Lebanon shall he be multiplied” (Psalm 91:11), the Psalmist says.

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians

The Jordan desert is rejoicing because the holy commemoration of the Righteous man of God, our God-bearing Father Gerasimus the anchorite, who came from Lycia, has flourished today. The Monastery bearing his name is also rejoicing, the Lavra of old, where the Grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us all, in order to glorify God in Eucharist, the One who has glorified those who glorify Him.

Paying heed to the Lord’s words: “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35); “And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37); Saint Gerasimus retreated to the deeper desert of Thebes and then to the blessed desert of the Jordan, where “he shone like a luminary and sowed the seeds of reverence” Saint Cyril of Scythopolis says.

Having become an imitator “of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises [of the Kingdom]” (Hebrews 6:12), Saint Gerasimus was established as a famous habitant of the Jordan and co-citizen of the Great ascetics, Euthymius the Great, Savvas the Sanctified, Saints Martyrios and Theoktistos and many other anchorites of the Judea desert, who followed the advice of King-Prophet David: “Seek the Lord, and his strength: seek his face evermore. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth” (Psalm 105:4-5).

Contemporary to him writers, who were also eye-witnesses to his manner of living, present God-bearing Gerasimus not only as “a lover of the things beyond this world”, but also as “a charity treasury” and “a temple of meekness”. In addition to other mortifications of the human passions, the Saint would pass the whole Great Lent without any food but the Holy Communion, for which reason he attained to the height of the vision of the divine glory, as his hymnographer says: “The ladder of divine virtue, thou didst scale with ardour, and thou didst attain to the height of divine noetic vision, receiving reflections pure and clear revealing the divine mysteries of Christ. Hence we honour thee with piety, as we cry, Gerasimus, thou God-bearer: Glory to Christ, Who hath given thee strength. Glory to Him Who hath crowned thee. Glory to Him Who worketh healings for all through thee” (Minaion, March 4, Matins, Sessional Hymn, tone 1).

The noetic vision our Holy Father Gerasimus attained, is no other than the vision of the glory of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, Who asked His Father not only for those who believed in Him but also for those who would believe in Him through their words [the Disciples’ preaching] “... [24] that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:20-24).

Interpreting these words of the Lord, Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: “the vision of Christ’s glory will neither be granted to the profane and the sinners, nor to those who defile the divine Law, but only to the holy and the benign. And we know this because Prophet Isaiah says: “Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord” (Isaiah 26:10). And in His Gospel preaching, Christ says: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). And who are those who are able to have a pure heart? Without doubt, those who through

their union with God, which is made through the Son by the Holy Spirit, have refrained from any kind of love of the flesh, and abhorred worldly desires to the highest level possible. They have refused their lives and submitted them to the will of the Holy Spirit, following Christ's manner of living in purity and in all other manners. Saint Paul was one of them, who in his utmost purity did not hesitate to say: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20).

To our question, in what manner do the Holy and the meek, the pure in heart achieve their union with God, or better say, their deification, the established Church Father Cyril replies: "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one" (John 17:23). For the Son becomes one with us, in flesh, as a man, joined to us with a mystical blessing; and spiritually, as God with the energy and grace of the Holy Spirit, which regenerates the spirit in us towards a new life and makes us communicants of His divine nature". The link of our unity with God the Father is always the Son, our Holy Father Cyril remarks. "We complete our unity with God the Father through the intercessor Christ".

It is precisely this divine completion in Christ, through the intercessor Christ, that Saint Gerasimus achieved, through his ascetic striving of fasting, abstinence, unceasing prayer and defeating hordes of demons, as his hymnographer says: "with the assaults of thy prayers, thou didst valiantly pierce the hordes of demons, through with wounds, O Gerasimus, and didst praise Christ the Son of God" (Matins, Ode 5, Troparion 3).

Today's festive commemoration of our Holy Father Gerasimus in his Monastery, in this first week of Lent, and amidst the pandemic plague of covid-19, urges us, my dear brethren, through Saint Paul's advice: "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others [who do not know Christ]; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of

the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation" (1 Thess. 5:6-8). And this is so, because as the hymnographer says: "The wealth of the grace of the Holy Spirit is offered unto all who gather it by the labours of abstinence" (Matins, Ode 9, Troparion 2).

Let us entreat our Holy Father Gerasimus and say along with the hymnographer: "He that became flesh of Thine all-holy blood, O immaculate Lady, Himself purgeth us of defilements of the flesh through fasting and labours, giving us strength by Thine unceasing entreaties, O Virgin Theotokos" (Matins, Ode 8, Theotokion). So that in repentance, humility and patience we may reach the luminous Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and be co-resurrected with Him. To Him belongs the glory and the might unto the ages. Amen."

After the Divine Liturgy, the hardworking and hospitable Hegoumen Archimandrite Chrysostom hosted a fasting meal for the Patriarchal Entourage and the congregation.

**From Secretariat-General**