

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

On Tuesday 13/26 October 2021, the Patriarchate celebrated the return of the relic of our Holy Father Savvas the Sanctified at the Holy Lavra he had founded.

The return of his relics was, as we elders remember, on 13/26 October 1965, after the request of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, which followed the visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Pope in the Holy Land, the removal of the anathemas and the beginning of the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church.

As a sign of goodwill, the Roman Catholic Church returned the relic that the Crusaders had transported to Venice. Ever since, the holy relic remains at its befitting place and reliquary, as an incorrupt heirloom of help for the Fathers of the Lavra and of healing of the infirmities of their infirmities, as well as of the pilgrims who visit it.

For the celebration of this event, an All-night Vigil was officiated at the Lavra by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with the co-celebration of their Eminences, Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias as the Bishop in charge of the feast this year, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Archbishop Methodios of Tabor and Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and Arab-speaking Priests. The chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon and Mr Gotsopoulos on the right in Greek, and by Archimandrite Philotheos and his choir on the left in Arabic. The Vigil was attended by faithful Christians from Bethlehem,

Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, the Monks of the Lavra and other Monks.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek” (Psalm 27:8) the psalmist sings.

Beloved holy Fathers and Brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians

The fragrance of the incorrupt relic of Savvas the Sanctified has gathered us all in his great Lavra to celebrate in Eucharist the return of his relic from Venice in 1965.

This festive event is especially honoured by the Holy Church of Jerusalem. And this is because according to Athanasius the Great, today’s feast is a type of heavenly joy. “Because if Moses had done everything according to the prototype he saw on the Mount, it is certain, that the worship held in the Tabernacle was a type of the mysteries in heaven, to which mysteries because Christ wants us to participate, He has prepared for us a new and enduring pathway. And just as all the old things were a type of the new, likewise, the present feast is a type of the joy up there”.

Our Holy Father Savvas became a participant of this joy of high above, of “the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23) as, since his childhood, his loving soul and heart sought God and the dwelling in the Judea desert, hearkening to David’s words: “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is” (Psalm 63:1).

This dry and uninhabited land did our Holy Father Savvas turn into a dwelling place of the divine grace and the power of the

Holy Spirit, where a multitude of monks and ascetics “worked out their own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12); and they still do until the present day, as the hymnographer of the Church witnesses this by saying: “with the streams of thy tears, thou didst cultivate the bareness of the desert; and by thy sighings from the depths, thou didst bear fruit a hundredfold in labours; and thou becamest a luminary, shining with miracles upon the world, O Savvas our righteous Father. Intercede with Christ God that our souls be saved” (Apolytikion of the Saint).

Indeed, my dear brethren, Saint Savvas became a luminary shining with miracles upon the world. And this, because the sanctified Savvas was strengthened with the power of the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ in the inner man, where Christ dwelt through the faith in his heart and was filled with all the fulness of God (Eph. 3:16-19).

The hymnographer of the Church calls God-receiving Savvas as the beauty of the monastics and the ascetics of the desert. And this, because our Holy Father Savvas, being under the protection of the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, shone like the light of Christ in the darkness of ignorance, and as the light of Christ he continues to shine in our contemporary world of disorder and apostasy!

The presence of the incorrupt relic in our midst and its diffuse fragrance is the guarantee and the criterion of the mindset of our Orthodox faith and of the Apostolic tradition which the Holy Fathers of our Church kept as a consignment.

And today, we who keep this great festive event of the return of the relic of Savvas the Sanctified, are called through Paul’s voice “that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ”

(Eph. 4:14-15).

Let us, therefore, entreat our Holy Father Savvas the blessed, who is near the throne of our God and Saviour Christ, to intercede with Him, that we may become worthy of the heavenly glory and Kingdom. Amen. Many happy returns!”

The Vigil was followed by a monastic meal and then the Patriarchal Entourage returned to Jerusalem through the Monastery of Abba Theodosios the Cenobiarch.

From Secretariat-General