

THE NAME DAY OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III

On Sunday 9/20 March 2022, on the commemoration of the Holy Forty Martyrs of the lake of Sebastia in Pontus during the reign of Licinius in AD 320, the Name Day of H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos was celebrated, as one of these Holy Martyrs was named Theophilos.

This feast was celebrated as a 'Parresia'. On Saturday afternoon the Great Vespers was observed at the Catholicon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, presided by His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos.

On Sunday morning the bloodless sacrifice was observed at the Catholicon, led by His Beatitude again, with the co-celebration of their Eminences the Metropolitans Kyriakos of Nazareth and Isychios of Kapitolias, the Archbishops Theophanes of Gerassa, Aristarchos of Constantina, Methodios of Tabor, Theodosios of Sebastia, Isidoros of Hierapolis, Nectarios of Anthedon, Philoumenos of Pella and Aristovoulos of Madaba, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks with first in rank the Dragoman Archimandrite Mattheos, at the chanting of Hierodeacon Simeon, Mr Gotsopoulos and the Patriarchal School students. The services were attended by the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras and the Consulate members, Monks, Nuns and local members of Jerusalem along with pilgrims.

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a Doxology and finally, the Patriarchal entourage and all congregation returned to the Patriarchate Reception Hall, where Geronda Secretary-General addressed His Beatitude as follows:

"Your Beatitude Father and Master,

As we ascend on the spiritual ladder of the Holy and Great Lent, awaiting the Holy Pascha, it is like the dew of Hermon that we receive from the Holy Church the comforting commemoration of the well-fought and crowned Holy Forty Martyrs of the lake of Sebastia of Pontus during the reign of Licinius in AD 320.

Their fervent faith in Christ, their patience and endurance that defied and overcame the freezing cold, strengthen and encourage us greatly for the continuation of the fasting struggle, not only as the abstinence from food but mainly as the alienation from the passions and the conquering of Christ's virtues, so that we may be glorified along with Him.

The Church of Jerusalem attributes special honour to those victorious Martyrs who beautify the feasts of March because its Primate, Your Holy Beatitude bears the name of one of those, the Holy Martyr Theophilos. In honour of this martyr and Your Beatitude, we offered the bloodless sacrifice and the Doxology at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre according to the order of 'Parresia', with the attendance of the full body of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood and the pious flock.

Having liturgically prayed for the health, stability and longevity of Your Beatitude, now at this Hall of the Patriarchate we add those things that need to be remembered as worthy of praise and thanksgiving.

First of all, that Your Beatitude was willing to hear the petitions of the Rum-Orthodox Arab-speaking flock either for the financial support of its projects, especially through the support of the educational system operating in its schools, or for the Theological education of the youth, in order to serve as Priests, spiritual guides of the parishes of their Communities. At the same time, the Sunday journal "Nour Il Masih" that was founded by You, and its accompanying Ecclesiastical newspaper have been distributed free of charge, to serve in the educational spiritual training, to cultivate

the preservation of the Rum Orthodox identity in the souls of the flock in their bond with the Patriarchate. An indication also of Your Beatitude's vivid interest in the preservation, projection and utilization of the educational and cultural inheritance of the Patriarchate is the over two-year-long preservation of the old prints and journals of the Central Library, the Library of the Theological School of the Cross and the reorganization of the precious material of the Archives by the special preserver Mr Stavros Andreou from Cyprus.

As far as the pilgrimage is concerned, Your Beatitude has shown special sensitivity in the defence and preservation of the rights of our nation on the one hand, and on the other, for the leader's role of the Patriarchate in its cooperation with the other Communities. Fruit of this spirit was the four years ago project of the National Technical University of Athens of the preservation and renovation of the Sacred Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre, and a continuation of this work is the project that began a few days ago by the University Sapienza of Rome, for the preservation of the tiles in the area of the north part of the rotunda floor, that of the seven arches, in front of the Sacred Edicule and the excavation of the floor beneath those to secure the building. These works that beautify the house of God project a message of conciliation, cooperation and peace from the Holy Sepulchre to humanity all over the world, which is tested in divisions and wars. The Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem has likewise not been bereft from Your Beatitude's interest and care, as it is obvious from the completion of the preservation of the iconostasion by the ARTIS company and the forthcoming renovation of the God-receiving Cave solely by us and the Franciscans according to the Status Quo.

Out of these, the most memorable is Your Beatitude's initiative for the protection of the Christian presence in the Holy Land. Within this initiative, at the ceremony of the

lighting of the Christmas tree at the Imperial Hotel, which is endangered by the illegal contracts, there was a condemnation of the Christians' oppression by the radical elements. Should these elements prevail, as we surely not wish so, the centuries-long entrance of the Heads of the Christian Churches through Jaffa Gate is at risk, as well as the entrance of the pilgrims and their route toward the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In this initiative, Your Beatitude summoned and received as cooperatives the Heads of the Christian Churches in the Holy Land. Through Your interview at the newspaper 'The Times' of London, You have enticed the interest of the Archbishop of Canterbury Mr John Welby and of His Beatitude the Patriarch Cyril of Moscow, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel showed interest in the dialogue of this matter, and the solution of this problem by the Government and not by Court.

With these successful and problem-solving actions of Your Beatitude, we the Hagiotaphite Fathers receive an example and are encouraged to carry out our Hagiotaphite ministry in zeal, each one separately and in group work, and add our part in the completion of the structure of the Patriarchate's body for its better projection to the world and richer contribution to the community.

In the spirit of joy of Your Name Day, Your Beatitude, and of the hope that stems from Your works, I raise my glass on a toast, on behalf of the Holy and Sacred Synod, and all the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood and I wish You many happy returns, peaceful, joyful, stable, creative and fruitful, for the praise of our venerable Patriarchate and our blessed nation and for the glory of our Trinitarian God. So be it."

Mr Vlioras as follows:

"Your Beatitude,

Your Eminences,

Reverend Fathers,

Ladies and Gentlemen

The participation in today's celebration is a special honour and joy for all of us, as the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood and the pious Flock, among them those who serve at the Consulate General of Greece in Jerusalem, honour the Name Day of the Primate of the Church of Jerusalem, the Mother of Churches, His Holy Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III.

On this occasion, Your Beatitude, we express on behalf of the Greek State, the respect and gratitude to You for your pastoral work, for the important work of preserving and promoting the Holy Places of our Faith in the Holy Land, for the defence of the righteous and the rights of our Patriarchate and for the preservation of the Greek and Rum-Orthodox presence in the Holy Land.

With your own initiatives, the restoration and elevation of the Holy Places are promoted, while you take care of the maintenance of the Status Quo in the Holy Land and for the spiritual guidance and prosperity of a flock that faces important and multifaceted challenges.

In an age plagued by conflict, reshuffle and the search for new balances, where fanaticism and intolerance grow stronger, your sincere disposition for communication, appeasement and reconciliation, both in relation to the other Doctrines and other religions in the particular environment of Jerusalem and of the Holy Land, as well as in the context of the wider effort for peace in this long-suffering area, highlights the prestige of the Holy See, making it a factor of moderation and stability.

On the occasion of your current Nomenclatures, I would like to assure once again both you and the members of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood that the support and assistance of the Greek State and our compatriots to our Patriarchate, to the Brotherhood

and to You is and also remains steadfast and substantial, and to express to you our recognition and admiration for the multifaceted work you perform with unparalleled dedication, zeal and self-sacrifice.

On this occasion, allow us to express, from the bottom of our hearts, our gratitude for the unparalleled hospitality we have enjoyed, both myself and the staff of our Authority during our visits to the Holy Shrines, where we have the opportunity to see the particularly emotional toil of concern and caring for the Holy Places, especially in the conditions created by the current pandemic.

Your Beatitude,

The defence of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, of its rights, is a very important priority for our Homeland, as it is said at every opportunity, given the offer of the Church of Jerusalem to Orthodoxy and Hellenism, as a long-standing witness and custodian of a precious religious and historic consignment.

Allow me, on this festive day, to express our most sincere and heartfelt wishes for health, longevity, and support from the Lord, so that you can continue to accomplish Your high mission, for the benefit of the Patriarchate, the Brotherhood, the Rum-Orthodox flock of Yours and the continuous Orthodox witness in the Holy Land."

The Representatives of the Patriarchates of Moscow and Romania and the Hagiotaphite Fathers.

His Beatitude thanked them all with the following address:

"How exceedingly radiant and majestic is the power of the Cross, O Christ, which placeth crowns for the Forty Martyrs by means of their adversaries! For having passed through fire and water, they cry out in incorruption: Blessed art Thou, the God of our Fathers", the hymnographer of the Church proclaims

(Matins, Ode 7, Troparion 5).

Your Excellency Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr
Evangelos Vlioras,

Reverend Holy Fathers and Brethren,

Noble Christians and pilgrims

"O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles" (Psalm 43:3) the reverend chorea of the Forty Martyrs in Sebastia cries out, whose annual commemoration we observe today.

These holy Forty Martyrs, "struggled on earth, were patient in the wind, were given over to the fire, the water welcomed them. Theirs is the voice "we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place" (Psalm 66:12), Saint Basil the Great says. The holy Martyrs managed this, paying heed to Saint Paul's words: "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Philippians 3:8).

According to Saint Gregory of Nice, "to those great fighters, not even the sun seemed to be sweet; but they distanced themselves even from the sun, not to be drifted away from the true light...for them, everything was of the enemy, everything was foreign. Only one thing was good, Christ. They refused everything, to gain Him".

This is proven by the indeed great love of the Martyrs towards our God and Saviour Christ, "who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). These God-called Martyrs dared to die for the only "good", namely the righteous Christ of God, as Saint Paul preaches: "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good

man some would even dare to die" (Romans 5:7).

The Holy chorea, who were equal in the fight, equal in their mind and they equally received the crowns, the full of God Forty Martyrs, just like other three children in the fiery furnace, in one mouth praised and glorified and blessed God (ref. Daniel 3:23, Prayer 27), saying: "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection... Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him" (Romans 6:5,8,9).

Having their faith steadfast, that "if we be dead with Christ, we shall also live in Him", the Holy Martyrs did not lose heart, nor were they afraid, but on the contrary, moved by the Holy Spirit, they sought the "redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7).

The annual feast of the Holy Forty Martyrs, and especially of their co-martyr Theophilos, whose the Holy Name Our Mediocrity bears, is "a memorial before God" (Acts 10:4). And this because the Holy Forty Martyrs who "made the earth a heaven and illumined everything" became the true witnesses and preachers all over the world about Christ's passions and His resurrection, but also, according to Saint Gregory of Nice, – satellites of Christ and builders of His Churches. According to Saint Paul, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20).

The Holy Forty Martyrs became builders of the Church because according to Saint Basil the Great, they were "made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men" (1 Cor. 4:9), "they raised up the fallen ones, secured those in doubt, increased twofold the desire of the pious". And according to their hymnographer, "in the splendid firmament of the august

Church, ye at all times brightly shine like unto great and lustrous stars and ye illuminate faithful men, O Forty Martyrs of Christ, sacred and divine" (Matins, Troparion1).

Our Holy Church of Jerusalem honours the commemoration of the Holy Forty Martyrs who struggled for the love of Christ in gleefulness and joy, as well as of their co-martyr Theophilos, by celebrating the Great Sacrament of the Eucharist at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, officiated by Our Mediocrity and surrounded by the reverend members of our Hagiotaphite Brotherhood, the High Priests, Priests and Hierodeacons, with the participation in prayer of the noble Christians from our flock, glorifying thus the "One who is wondrous in His saints".

Moreover, we have rendered a thanksgiving Doxology to the Holy Trinitarian God on our Holy Name Day, owed to the Holy Martyr Theophilos. And we blessed, according to Saint Polykarpos of Smyrna, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of our souls and governor of our bodies and Shepherd of the Ecumenical Church around the world".

Referring to the meaning of the honour we attribute to the Saints, Saint John Damascene calls upon the witness of Saint John the Evangelist and Theologian and of the wise Saint Paul, according to whom, the Saints in general, and the Martyrs in particular, are friends of Christ, children and heirs of God; "But as many as received him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12). "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4:7).

And we say this because the feast of the Holy Forty Martyrs and especially of their co-martyr Theophilos does not refer to our mediocrity only, but primarily to the Apostolic and Patriarchal institution of the Church, through which "we become able to participate in the lot of the Saints in the light...of the Son of His [God's] love (cf. Col. 1:12-13). "And

he is before all things, and by him, all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:17-18), "which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). The Holy Forty Martyrs became communicants of this blood of Christ.

Hearkening to Saint Paul's preaching, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12), the Holy Martyrs who loved Christ, ignored the things of the temporary life in order to glorify God in their body parts", Saint Basil the Great says. Therefore, their commemoration, of those Martyrs and friends of God projects like the lightning of the noetic illumination of Christ to a divine ray that guides all of us.

According to Clement of Alexandria: "completion of the martyrdom we call not the end of the life any man received like the others, but that he completed the work of love". Precisely this "perfect, complete work of love", which is the unity of the various Orthodox Churches is what the Holy Forty Martyrs call us to show, as Saint Basil the Great phrased the example of the Martyrs that we need to imitate with the words: "There was not one country for the saints, each of them came from a different part of the world...the human nation of each of them was different, but the spiritual was one for all. For their common Father was God, and they were all brethren, not born of a man and a woman, but from the adoption of the Spirit, becoming one in the unity of the love for each other". In other words, Saint Paul's words, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3) has found its practice in these Martyrs.

We are also called to obey this order, namely the unity, peace, conciliation and love of the Gospel of God and our Saviour Christ, my dear brethren, especially during this

blessed period of the fasting of the Holy and Great Lent, "that we might be fellow helpers to the truth" (3 John 8). And this because as Saint Paul says, this very God in Christ committed unto us the preaching of conciliation. "...and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19)

Having, therefore, companions and helpers the holy Forty Martyrs and their co-martyr and our protector Theophilos and the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, let us entreat them to reach the luminous Resurrection of our God and Saviour of our souls in peace, humility and repentance.

For all these, we call upon all those who prayed with Us and honoured the festal commemoration of the Holy Martyrs, wishing them strength from on high, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Grace of the Holy Sepulchre and every blessing coming from God, expressing our warmest thanks also to those who addressed Us."

There was a monastic meal at noon.

From Secretariat-General