

THE FEAST OF THE HOLY APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Tuesday 29 June/ 12 July 2022, the Patriarchate celebrated the commemoration of the Holy Glorious and Chiefs of the Apostles, Peter and Paul, at the Holy Church dedicated to them in Capernaum.

On this feast the Church honours the Apostle Peter as the one who confessed Christ to be the Son of God and heard by Him, "You are Peter and, on this rock, shall I build my Church", and the Apostle Paul as the one who was called by the Lord on his way to Damascus and preached Him "more than anyone else".

For the feast of the Chiefs of the Apostles the Divine Liturgy was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos in this Church, with the co-celebration of their Eminences, Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth and Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks among whom Archimandrite Parthenios, Arab-speaking Priests from the Holy Metropolis of Nazareth and Priests from the Russian Church of Diaspora, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacon Eulogios. The chanting was delivered by Mr Gotsopoulos with the help of the Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba and a Byzantine choir, as the service was attended by a congregation of Greek, Russian and Palestinian faithful Christians.

His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon to this congregation:

"A joyous feast is shining on the whole world today. It is the preeminent commemoration of the most wise and paramount Apostles, Peter and Paul. O brethren, let us also joyfully celebrate this solemn day, with hymns and poetry, and let us salute them and say, "Rejoice! O Peter, Apostle and genuine

friend of your teacher, Christ our God! Rejoice! O beloved Paul, preacher of the faith and teacher of the whole world! As you were both chosen in holiness and have confidence in prayer, earnestly entreat Christ our God, for the salvation of our souls" (Glory, aposticha Vespers), the hymnographer of the Church proclaims.

Beloved brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians and Pilgrims

The citizens of Jerusalem on high, Peter, the chief of the Apostles and rock of the faith, and Paul, the preacher of Christ's Church, have gathered us all in the Church dedicated to them in this holy Shrine of the biblical town of Capernaum to celebrate their commemoration.

Having become vessels of the Holy Spirit, they preached the redeeming Gospel of Christ all over the universe and were distinguished among the other apostles who were called by the Lord. Peter's confession "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16), is what made Jesus say "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock, I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

And Paul's preaching about the Lord, immediately after his baptism in Damascus, that Christ is the Son of God (ref. Acts 9: 19-20) was the result of the Lord's words to Ananias: "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15).

Both blessed Peter's confession and Saint Paul's preaching that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16) are of great importance, because Christ is not only recognised as the Messiah but primarily and mainly as perfect God, "having been born of the same essence with the Father", as Theophylaktos says. "He confessed Him to be the genuine Son

of God", Saint Chrysostom teaches. "He realised Him to be of the same nature and especially the Son of God", Zigavinos comments.

Peter and Paul, the Chiefs of the Apostles, through the Holy Spirit managed to capture into their logical nets the multitudes of the nations, to make them know the true God, according to the words of Jesus Christ: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19).

The twelve Apostles in general, and especially these two, Peter and Paul, became the establishers of the Churches that were founded all over the world, as Saint Paul witnesses: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:8-9).

"The unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8) that Peter got to know as an ear-and-eye witness of the Lord's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor (ref. 2 Peter 1:18), he evangelizes to all saying: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with him in the holy mount" (2 Peter 1:16-18).

It is noteworthy that Peter abandoned his profession as a fisherman and received from on high, by the Father, the revelation of the incarnation of God the Word. While Paul, "was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor. 12:4).

Having received the experience of these unspeakable divine mysteries, Peter and Paul sowed the seeds of reverence all over the world and enlightened the whole congregation of the Church.

Behold, therefore, why these two Saints are called foundations and pillars of the Church, preachers of the faith and teachers of the universe. "Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (Psalm 19:5) the Psalmist proclaims. Behold, again, why this holy couple is the boast of the Church. It is noteworthy also, that the Church boasts over its founders and pillars, the Apostles Peter and Paul, while they boast over the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ "by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Galatians 6:14), Saint Paul preaches. And according to Saint John Damascene, "the weapon of the cross became the salvation of the faithful and Paul's boast". That is why the hymnographer says, through Your Cross, O Christ, there was one flock of the Angels and the people and one Church; the heavens and the earth rejoice, Glory to Thee.

Indeed, my dear brethren, the One Church of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in heaven and on earth, rejoices, and thus we say along with the hymnographer: "Rejoice, Peter and Paul, unbroken foundations of the divine dogmas, friends of Christ, worthy vessels. Come and be in our midst invisibly, and count us worthy of immaterial gifts, as we extol your feast with songs" (Glory of Praises, Matins). Amen! Many happy returns!"

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a reception and an outdoor meal with fish from the Tiberias sea, by the renovator of the Monastery and the Church, the hardworking Caretaker Monk Eirinarchos.

From Secretariat-General