

THE FEAST OF OUR RIGHTEOUS FATHER SAVVAS THE SANCTIFIED AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Sunday, 5th/18th of December 2022, the feast of our Holy Father Savvas was celebrated in the Holy Monastery named after him, which he himself founded on the right bank of the Brook of the Cedars that descends towards the direction of the Dead Sea.

On this feast, the Church of Jerusalem commemorates anew that Saint Savvas came from his birthplace Mutalaski in Cappadocia to the Holy Land in the year 456 at the age of 18.

At first, he studied under Euthymius the Great and Abba Theodosios for twenty years and then lived a hesychastic life in a cave opposite the Monastery, which is preserved to this day.

Distinguished in obedience, humility and devoted to all virtues, he was called upon by the monks of the desert and founded for them his Monastery as a Lavra, that is, a monastery for monks who had advanced to asceticism, and he guided to the right monastic state thousands of monks of this Monastery and of the eleven other Monasteries, which he founded. Along with his fellow patriot and co-ascetic Saint Theodosios the Cenobiarch, he became the defender of the doctrine of the Fourth Ecumenical Synod of Chalcedon in AD 451 of the synergy of the two natures, human and divine, in the one person of Christ, unconfused and indivisible. There were also many saints who lived in his Holy Monastery, such as Saint John of Damascus, Saint Stephen of Saint Savvas Monastery, John the Bishop of Cologne and others.

In honour of Saint Savvas, there was a feast which was presided over by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem

Theophilos with the co-celebration of the High Priest according to the order for this year, His Eminence Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Spiritual Father of the Monastery Archimandrite Eudokimos, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, Archimandrite Dionysios and deacons, Arab-speaking Priests and Fr Joseph. The chanting was delivered on the right by Hierodeacon Simeon, His Eminence Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba and Fr George from the Holy Metropolis of Elias in Greek and by a Byzantine choir under the Bethlehem choir leader Mr Elias, at the presence of the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras, monks and pilgrims and members of the flock from Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“O Godly Savvas, blazing pillar bright with virtues’ fire, and beacon-light that showeth peoples the way leading through the sea of the wide world unto that divine port: spirits of error hast thou cast to the ground, O thou purest vessel of God the Holy Spirit; unto monastics thou art a guide and an exact rule and standard of abstinence; the outstanding height of true humility and meekness and fountain gushing forth with seas of cures and healings. Do thou entreat Christ, do thou plead with Christ, O righteous one, that the Church may be granted concord, tranquillity, great mercy and lasting unity” the hymnographer of the Church proclaims (Great Vespers, sticheron 3).

“Beloved brethren in Christ,

Dear Christians,

The holy Church of God, namely the Church of Jerusalem, today honours and upholds the memory of our holy and God-bearing Father Savvas the sanctified, in this Lavra which bears his

name.

Saint Savvas diligently practised the virtue from infancy, becoming a vessel and instrument of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, thus becoming a teacher of the monasteries of the desert, a far shining luminary of the faithful, the peer of the Angels and the companion of the righteous. And his fame spread to the ends of the world, as the psalmist says: "The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein forever" (Psalm 37:29).

Our Father Savvas, the offspring of Cappadocia, having come to the Holy Land at a young age, knew the great teachers of the desert such as Theodosius the Cenobiarch, Theoktistos, Gerasimos and the great teacher of the desert Euthymius, next to whom he was taught the manner of living of the ascetics, thus becoming a spiritual luminary, shining with miracles upon the world, as his fragrant imperishable relic also testifies.

Holding in his heart the illuminating energy of the Holy Spirit, Saint Savvas not only cultivated the barren desert by the streams of his tears but also became a defender of the Orthodox faith and the doctrines of the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon, before the Kings of Constantinople Anastasios and Justin the Great. Therefore, even the hymnographer shouts in amazement and says: "O strange and terrible wonder is the clay tongue, the clay nature, the earthen body, for it has indicated the noetic and immaterial [of the Holy Spirit] knowledge".

The God-fearing Savvas received the illumination of the Holy Spirit because he did not care for the earthly things but for the kingdom in the heavens, listening to Paul saying: "For our conversation is in heaven? from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil 3:20-21).

It is noteworthy that as the Hegoumen of the Lavra and shepherd of rational sheep, that is, monks, Saint Savvas ruled imitating the state of Paul, who “served the Lord after all humility and many tears and temptations of what happened to him in the councils of the warlike enemy of the devil” (Cf. Acts 20,19).

The renowned biographer of our holy Father Savvas, Kyrillos Scythopolitis writes about him: “Having received strength from on high [Savvas] surrenders himself to self-control as he suspends evil thoughts and fights the heaviness of sleep, and he restrains himself toiling physically, remembering David’s melody to God which says, “Look upon mine affliction and my pain and forgive all my sins” (Psalm 25:18). With all study and willingness, he humbled his soul with hunger, and tamed his body with toil and labour. Having sixty or even seventy co-ascetics in the monastery, he surpassed all of them in humility, obedience and painstaking for the sake of reverence”.

From the above, it is clearly demonstrated that the weapons of the asceticism, of the spiritual struggle of our Father Savvas, were obedience and humility. In his speech about obedience, Saint John of the Ladder says: “obedience is the tomb of will and the rising of humility” and in simple words, obedience means the burial of our own will and the resurrection of humility. Christ, on the other hand, is the ultimate model of humility, that is, of self-denial and obedience, as Paul also preaches. “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:8-9).

The Son and Word of God was found in human form from the Holy Spirit and the pure blood of the Virgin Mary for our salvation so that we might be deified, as the Great Father of the Church Athanasius says: “He became man, that we might also be deified; he revealed himself through the body so that we may

receive the understanding [= knowledge] of the invisible Father; and he endured the curse of men, so that we may inherit immortality”.

Our sanctified Father Savvas also inherited this exact immortality in Christ through his humility and obedience to the will of God: “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister, and mother” (Matt. 12:50), the Lord says.

Indeed, my beloved brothers, Saint Savvas was shown to be the brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, having boldness to Him; therefore, after the hymnographer, let us tell him: “O righteous Father Savvas, into all the earth, hath the sound of thine achievements gone forth?” wherefore thou hast found in the Heavens the reward of thy labours. Thou didst destroy the ranks of the demons? thou didst attain to the orders of the Angels, whose life thou didst emulate without blame. Since thou hast boldness with Christ God, pray that peace be granted unto our souls” (Matins, idiomelon after Matin’s Gospel).

Moreover, let us implore the righteous and sanctified Savvas, so that we may pass the stage of the blessed fast of Christmas and be worthy to worship the immaculate Son of the most blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, in the God-receiving cave of Bethlehem, Amen. Merry Christmas.”

After the Divine Liturgy, a monastic meal followed.

After blessing the monks in the morning, His Beatitude returned to Jerusalem, passing through the Monastery of Saint Theodosios.

From Secretariat-General