

HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM CELEBRATES THE D. LITURGY AT THE HOLY CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE IN REINE

On the Sunday of the Blind Man, 8th/ 21st May 2023, according to the book of Pentecostarion, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Holy Church of Saint George in the Rum-Orthodox Arabic-speaking community of Reine, a town near Nazareth.

Before the Liturgy, His Beatitude was warmly welcomed by the Boy Scouts of the Community.

Co-celebrants to His Beatitude were their Eminences, the Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, the Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios, the ministering Dean Priest of the Church Fr Simeon, and other Priests from the neighbouring communities, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacon Eulogios, under the chanting of the local Byzantine choir.

Before the Holy Communion, His Beatitude delivered the following sermon:

“And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man who was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9,1-3).

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Reverend Christians

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Master and Creator of all, has gathered all of us through the Holy Spirit in this in this holy beautiful Church of yours, to celebrate the miracle Jesus worked on the man who was born blind, by applying clay to his eyes.

This miracle on the man who was born blind is distinguished among all other miracles of Jesus, because, "Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind" (John 9,32). It is noteworthy that Jesus cured the blind man out of "self-imposed goodness", as Saint Gregory Palamas says: "In Jerusalem, when [Jesus] saw a man who was born blind, without being asked, but moved by self-imposed goodness, He spat on the earth and made clay and placed it on the blind man's eyes, saying to him; go and wash in Siloam's pool."

Christ cured the blind man "by self-imposed goodness", because this way he revealed that He is the greatest and most glorious of all, as Saint Cyril of Alexandria says. In other words, through this action, Christ proved that He has the power and the authority that none of the Saints had ever had. To this cause, Jesus refers to this miracle as proof of "reversing blindness", which no one else had ever managed to achieve before or ever since.

As for the cured blind man, he boldly replied to the provoking accusations of the unbeliever Pharisees against Jesus Christ who cured him, as well as to the threatening ironic comments against himself: "If this man were not of God, he could do nothing" (John 9,33).

These words of the blind man are a confession of faith, that the One who cured him is sent by God. His confession of faith stems from his faith according to the psalmist: "I believed, therefore, I have spoken" (Ps. 116,1), and as per Saint Paul: "We also believe, and therefore speak" (2 Cor. 4,13). This means, that we who have the same living faith as David the

psalmist, believe in the true God, that is why we confess and preach our faith.

The power of the confession of the blind man's faith is noted in his reply to Jesus: "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him" (John 9,36-38).

Interpreting these words of the Gospel, Zigavinos says: "[the blind man] believed at once; for the words touched his soul immediately, finding it benign and shone upon it knowledge and faith." And Saint Basil the Great says: "Like this, worship comes after faith, while faith is confirmed through power...and we get to know God through power; so we believe in the One we know and worship the One we believe in."

Indeed, the action of the power of Christ, the Son of God, is the one that significantly contributed to the cured blind man's faith, as this is shown by his reply to the Pharisees: "Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9,25).

It is noteworthy that the cured blind man does not offer explanations about the method of treatment, nor does he resort to theories to clarify the miracle, that is, the experience of the indescribable benefit he received from the light-giver Christ. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (James 1,17), the Apostle James preaches.

Christ, my dear brethren, granted the blind man not only the light to his eyes, but at the same time, He gave him "His wondrous light" (1 Peter 2,9). That is why the cured blind man said to Jesus: "Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him" (John 9,38). In other words, the blind man was called by Christ unto His wondrous light. "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the

light of life" (John 8,12), the Lord says.

Precisely this "light of life" shone upon the world during the luminous resurrection from the dead of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, as Saint John Damascene writes in his hymn: "Let us arise in the deep dawn and instead of myrrh, offer praise to the Master, and we shall see Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, Who causeth life to dawn for all" (Katavasiae of Pascha, Ode 5).

Christ is the Sun of righteousness, which causes life to dawn upon every man on earth. The unwaning light of the Resurrection breaks the darkness of night and the hope and joy of life in Christ comes after the despair of death. "The rising sun" from the tomb, namely our Lord Jesus Christ, grants eternal and true life to all.

"Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight" (John 9,11) said the blind man. This order of Jesus, my dear brethren, applies to all of us. And this is because Siloam's pool is no other than the Church of Christ, where the gifts of the Holy Spirit are freely offered through the holy sacraments, especially through the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Our Holy Church is the hospital and medical centre for our various mental and physical ailments.

Let us, therefore, entreat the healer of the man who was born blind and say along with the hymnographer: "O Christ God, Thou spiritual Sun of Righteousness, Who with Thine immaculate touch didst enlighten both the body and soul of him who from his mother's womb was deprived of sight, illuminate the eyes of our souls also, and show us to be sons of the day, that we might cry to Thee with faith: Great and ineffable is Thy compassion toward us, O Friend of man; glory be to Thee" (Vespers, Glory of the Aposticha). Christ is risen! Many happy returns!"

At the reception after the Divine Liturgy His Beatitude also

said the following:

“And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man who was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9,1-3).

Honourable President and members of the Ecclesiastical Council,

Reverend Holy Fathers and Brothers,

Reverend Father Simeon,

Dear Christians

Our Patriarchal presence among you during today's feast of the Sunday of the Blind man fills our hearts with joy and cheerfulness, according to the order of Saint Paul: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20,28).

Indeed, the Holy Spirit is the One Who has established bishops to pastor the Church of Christ. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of our God and Saviour Christ is the One Who puts together and constitutes the whole institution of the Church, which is founded upon Christ's blood on the Cross. “Which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20,28), Saint Paul preaches. And according to the true testimony of Saint John the Theologian, whom we celebrate also today; “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10,11).

The Church of Christ, namely the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem boasts in Jesus Christ for the ‘little flock’ (cf.

Luke 12,32) of your town Reine, which is distinguished for the unity and confession of its Christian faith, according to the example of the cured blind man, who said in today's Gospel narrative: "If this man were not of God, he could do nothing" (John 9,33).

This confession of the formerly blind man, that his healer, the man named Jesus, "was of God", namely, He was sent by God, gives further testimony to Jesus' reply to His disciples; "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9,3).

This appearance of God's works and His Church did we also see with our own eyes in your blessed community. That is why we rendered glory and thanksgiving to the resurrected from the dead, our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And we say along with Saint Chrysostom: "Christ is with me, of whom shall I be afraid? Even if the waves are striking against me, or the open seas, or the lord's wrath; for me all these are less powerless than a spider's web". Christ is risen! Many happy returns, fruitful in Christ!"

After the reception, the Community hosted a meal for His Beatitude and those with Him.

From Secretariat-General