

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

On Wednesday, June 29 / July 12, 2023, the feast of the Holy Glorious and Chiefs of the Apostles Peter and Paul was celebrated by the Patriarchate.

On this feast, the Church honours the Apostle Peter, remembering that he heard the call of the Lord at the Sea of Tiberias and followed Him after his brother Andrew and confessed Him saying: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16,16) and denied Him, but he repented and proclaimed Him to the gathered multitudes on the day of Pentecost and in Judea, Antioch and finally in Rome, where he died by death on the cross.

The Church also honours the apostle Paul, a former persecutor, but enlightened on his march to Damascus and called to the apostolic office and preaching Christ and labouring for all others through Christ and being able to say: " I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20) and wrote his 14 letters and ascended to the third heaven.

The feast of the honour of the two Chiefs of the Apostles was celebrated in the Holy Church in Capernaum by the sea, founded by the late Patriarch Damianos of Jerusalem in 1931.

The Divine Liturgy was officiated by His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, along with their Eminences, the Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, and the Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Archimandrite Sillas and Priests from the Galilee district, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacon Dositheos. The chanting was delivered by His Eminence Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba with the choir of Beer Sheva in Greek, Russian, Arabic and Romanian, and by the

Acre Byzantine choir, without Fr Philotheos. The service was attended by many faithful Christians, Greeks, Russians from Galilee and others.

His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon to this congregation:

“Let us all praise with sacred hymns Peter and Paul the men of God, the foremost of the Apostles and the bright lights of the whole world; the preachers of the holy Faith, the trumpets of theology, revealers of divine decrees, the pillars of the august Church and the destroyers of error” (Matins, Exaposteilarion), the hymnographer of the Church proclaims.

Beloved brethren in Christ,

Reverend Christians and Pilgrims

The most sacred grace of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul has gathered us all in this holy place of the biblical seaside town of Capernaum to celebrate their commemoration.

The chiefs of the Apostles, Peter and Paul, are especially honoured by our Holy Church because they were called by the Lord; Peter of faith, “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), while Paul as a chosen vessel, “But the Lord said unto him, 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 of them were full of the Holy Spirit and the Divine Grace, just like the rest of the Apostles, Peter, however, confessed the divinity and sonship of Jesus saying: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16,16). “Through the addition of the article [the Son], he confessed Him to be the genuine Son of God by nature”, Saint Chrysostom interprets. “He did not say this without the article, but with

the article 'the' Son, therefore, He is the one and only...being born of the same essence of the Father", Theophylaktos comments.

Paul received special gifts and revelations from God as he says: "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor. 12,2-4).

Peter's correct proclamation of faith and confession of Jesus Christ served as the stone upon which the Church is built, as the Ark of salvation of our souls "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you" (1 Peter 1,9-10), Saint Peter preaches.

And Paul's proclamation, "But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. 15,13-14), became the cornerstone upon which the faith of Christ crucified and risen from the dead was founded, as expressed, apostolically, theologically and in doctrine by the Holy God-bearing Fathers of the Church, through the Holy Spirit in the Ecumenical Councils, according to the precise "form of doctrine" (Romans 6,17), which is the rule of the Christian teaching, as Saint Paul says.

It is also noteworthy that the apostolic preaching and the Christian teaching of both Peter and Paul were not limited to the Jews only, but were extended especially towards the nations, namely the idolaters, following the Lord's command, "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). Saint Paul, therefore, confesses that he was called by God, "that I might preach him among the heathen" (Gal. 1,16). Moreover, he says to the Christians of the nations, "For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office" (Romans 11,13).

Indeed, my dear brethren, Saint Paul glorified, and honoured his ministry around the nations, preaching and proving at the same time that the Incarnate God the Word Who became man, the Son of God and our Lord Jesus Christ is "the light of the world" (John 8,12), "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14,6) and the freedom; "and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3,17). That is why Paul preaches, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" (1 Cor. 3,19). Similarly, Peter says, "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" (2 Peter 1,16).

Both Peter and Paul became eye-witnesses and seers of God's glory and majesty, and they are an example of repentance for the sinners, as the hymnographer exclaims: "As example of conversion, Thou hast given to them that sin Thy two faithful Apostles, Lord: the one said he knew Thee not t Thy holy Passion, but again repented; the other fiercely strove against and persecuted the preachings of Thy Name; and both of them became the chiefest of the company of Thy friends, O my Jesus Almighty Lord, Thou divine Saviour of our souls" (Small Vespers, sticheron 3).

My dear brethren, as we honour today the chiefs of the Apostles and teachers of the universe, we are called to imitate their repentance, as Saint Gregory Palamas urges us, beseeching their intercessions, along with those of the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, for the salvation of our souls. Amen. Many happy returns!"

After the Divine Liturgy the renovator of the Monastery Monk Eirinarchos hosted a reception and a festal meal with fish from Tiberias Sea.

From Secretariat-General