

MEETING OF WOMEN'S COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS OF THE PATRIARCHATE IN BEIT JALA

On the morning of Thursday, July 14/27, 2023, a Divine Liturgy was held in the Holy Church of the Nativity of the Virgin of the Beit Jala Community under the leadership of its priests, presided over by the Hegoumen Archimandrite Ignatios, with the participation in prayer of the Priests and the Ladies, (approximately 300), from eleven Communities of the Patriarchate of the West Bank of the Palestinian Authority. His Beatitude blessed this liturgical event with the following address:

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”(Ps. 133,1), the psalmist proclaims. “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”(Matt. 18,20) the Lord says.

Beloved children in Christ, brothers and sisters.

Our gathering in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in this historic and biblical town of Beit Jala is indeed excellent and pleasant. And this is because, in his Hierarchal prayer, Jesus Christ prays to His God and Father for Himself, His Disciples the Apostles, and all those who will believe in Him, saying: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so, have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes, I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17,17-21).

Interpreting these words of the Lord, Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: "Christ seeks the bond of love, unity and peace, to gather those who believe in Him in the unity of the Holy Spirit". And Zigavinos says: "Having as a starting point of reference love and unity, Christ concludes in this again, showing that love is God-pleasing and most significant".

It is noteworthy that this is not referring to a unity of essence, as in the case of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, but of love. It is about the unity of the Spirit that will result from the fact that they will be "one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling", having "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Cf. Eph. 4,4-6), as Saint Paul preaches. And according to Saint John the Theologian, Jesus died "that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John 11,52).

During Christ's Passion on the Cross, this love, the mother's love, was primarily shown by His Mother, the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, and secondly by the myrrh-bearing women. This love was expressed by Lazarus' sisters, Martha and Mary when they received Christ in their house in Bethany, where Jesus took the opportunity to reprimand Martha with the words, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10,41-42).

Interpreting these words of the Lord, Theophylactos notes: "Great is the benefit of hospitality, which Martha showed, and it cannot be disregarded; however, it is of greater good to pay heed to the spiritual words". And Zigavinos says: "Jesus said 'the good part', not meaning that the other part was evil, but He called 'good' the one which was superior. There are two good parts, but the one is better than the other".

In other words, my beloved children in Christ, the serving of

the two sisters Martha and Mary is distinguished in two parts; the care of the body, the daily needs, and the care of the soul, the care of the spiritual needs. Both types of serving by those who love the Church, the vineyard of the Lord, should aim at the glory of the Lord, according to each person's calling. "Every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that" (1 Cor. 7,7).

"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences in administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all" (1 Cor. 12,4-6), the wise Paul preaches.

This means that woman is nowhere less in the struggles of faith, as Saint Chrysostom teaches: "There is no male nor female sex for Christ, neither the nature of man, neither the infirmity of the body, neither age nor anything else of the like which would prevent those who walk in the path of reverence if there is a brave willingness and vigilant mindset and fervent and rooted fear of God in our souls".

These words of Saint Chrysostom are confirmed by the multitude of the holy women, prophetesses, equal-to-the-apostles, righteous great martyrs and confessors, who are commemorated in the Old and New Testament of the Bible, as well as in the historical course of life of the earthly Church devoted to God. And again, Saint Chrysostom stresses the fact that as far as the struggle for God and the toils for the Church are concerned, it is the woman who engages in good efforts and labours more boldly than man.

It is made clear that the mission of the Christian woman today, "just like that of the holy women of old" (1 Peter 3,5), in the world of confusion, apostasy, lawlessness and "in the day of temptation in the wilderness" (cf. Hebrews 3,8), is more necessary than ever. Therefore, we are called to listen to the Apostle Peter saying: "Humble yourselves therefore

under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for He careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5, 6-8).

Our Holy Church of Jerusalem, founded upon the Resurrected Christ's Blood on the Cross, continues its redeeming mission, according to the Apostolic tradition and that of the Holy Fathers, fortified and encouraged by the Lord's word: "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16,18).

Finally, we would like to thank all those who contributed to organizing this God-pleasing gathering of the Rum-Orthodox women's unions, especially the Reverend Father Elias who took this initiative, as well as our dearest Fathers Boutros and Yusef.

May the Grace of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

From Secretariat-General