

THE FEAST OF THE PROPHET ELIJAH AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Wednesday, July 20 / August 2, 2023, the Patriarchate celebrated the feast of the Prophet Elijah of Thesbes, so named from his hometown Thesbes or Thisbes of the city of Gilead.

During this feast, the Church recalls to its memory the things about the prophet Elijah as described in the Old Testament, mainly in the books of the Kings, but also in the New Testament, in the Gospels through the words of the Lord and in the Catholic Epistle of Saint James the Brother of God.

The prophet Elijah, as from his zeal for God, was called a zealot, and because of his faith he was heard and performed many miracles through God, such as the absence of rain for three years and the falling of rain again, the burning of the stones and firewood of the altar on Mount Carmel, the resurrection of the daughter of the Sumanite woman, the crossing of the Jordan river and the throwing of his fleece to his disciple Elisha, through which he parted the waters of the Jordan and walked as if on dry land and also received double his teacher's grace.

According to his apolytikion, the prophet Elijah is: "the incarnate angel the prophets' summit and boast, the second Forerunner of Christ's presence".

In honour of the prophet Elijah, Vespers was held in his Holy Monastery, between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, on Tuesday evening, by His Eminence Metropolitan Benediktos of Diocesarea, and the Divine Liturgy on the morning of the feast, presided over by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, along with their Eminences, Metropolitan Isychios of Capitolas and the Archbishops Aristarchos of

Constantina and Theodosios of Sebastia. The chanting was delivered by Mr Angelos in Greek and the choir of Saint James the Brother of God under Mr Rimon Kamar in Arabic. The service was attended by many Greek-speaking Orthodox believers, but mainly Arabic speakers from the occupied territories and especially from Jerusalem.

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

“When thou wast united unto our God through thy virtue and unspotted life, O Prophet of renown, and hadst for this cause received from Him authority and power, then thou didst change creation as seemed good to thee, and by thy will didst shut the gates of rain on high; and thou didst bring fire down from above, wholly consuming and impious. Do thou entreat Christ the Saviour that our souls be saved” (Matins, praises, Troparion 1).

Beloved brethren in Christ,

Reverend Christians and pilgrims

“The incarnate Angel and the prophet’s summit and boast, Elijah the glorious”, has gathered us all in this holy place to celebrate his holy commemoration of his fiery ascension into the heavens in Eucharist.

Praising the character of Elijah of Thesbis, Sirach says about him: “Then Elijah arose, a prophet like fire, and his word burned like a torch. He brought a famine upon them, and by his zeal he made them few in number. By the word of the Lord he shut up the heavens, and also three times brought down fire. How glorious you were, Elijah, in your wondrous deeds! Whose glory is equal to yours?” (Sirach 48,1-4).

Saint James the Brother of God, referring to the power of the righteous man’s prayer says in his catholic epistle: “The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Elijah was

a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest" (James 5,16-18).

And Luke and Mark the Evangelists mention the presence of the Prophet Elijah during the Lord's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor: "Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one[a] on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus" (Mark 9,2-4/ Luke 9,28-30).

The conversation among Elijah, Moses and Jesus testifies to the fact that Christ is the Lord of the Law of Moses and of the prophets and Moses appears as the representative of the Law, while Elijah as the representative of the prophets according to the interpretation of Origen and of Saint Cyril of Alexandria. "Moses appears as the man of the Law, while Elijah as that of the prophets; for He [Christ] is the Lord of the Law and of the Prophets".

Elijah was distinguished to the extent that he was the only one of the prophets, after Moses to converse with the Transfigured Christ, the Christ that they both knew on Mount Sinai; Moses knew Him as "fire and steam and darkness", while Elijah like "fine breeze of thin air" (3 Kings 19,22). They saw God with their own eyes, in the Transfigured Jesus Christ on Mount Tabor, becoming the exception to the Lord's word to His disciples: "Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it" (Matt. 13,17).

Indeed, my dear brothers and sisters, Elijah from Thesbis was specially favoured by God. And this was because as the hymnographer says: "When thou wast united unto our God through

thy virtue and unspotted life, O Prophet of renown, and hadst for this cause received from Him authority and power, then thou didst change creation as seemed good to thee, and by thy will didst shut the gates of rain on high; and thou didst bring fire down from above, wholly consuming and impious. Do thou entreat Christ the Saviour that our souls be saved" (Matins, praises, Troparion 1).

This authority was also received by Christ's disciples and saints, as Saint Luke the Evangelist says: "See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you" (Luke 10,19).

Interpreting these words of the Lord, Saint Basil the Great notes that it is impossible for man to exercise this power, if he has not cleared himself and become fortified by the Lord beforehand, the Lord who said to the apostles, behold I have given you the power to tread on snakes and scorpions.

In other words, my dear brothers and sisters, the one who hears and keeps God's commandments is able through the power of the divine Grace to become a communicant of the power of the prophet Elijah, just like the prophet Elisha, who followed him.

Behold why Saint Paul says, "Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1,27).

It is noteworthy that the prophet Elijah has a special place in both the Old and the New Testament. And this is so because Elijah is recognized as the second forerunner of the presence of Christ, meaning the last days of the Judgment. Regarding the reappearance of zealot Elijah during the last days, the prophet Malachi says about him: "Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (Malachi 4,4). Replying to His disciples' question, "Why, then, do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

Jesus replied, "Elijah is indeed coming and will restore all things" (Matt. 17,10-11).

According to the interpretation of the distinguished Church Fathers, the Lord here speaks about His Second Coming, of which Elijah is the forerunner. "I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased" (Matt. 17,12). This second Elijah is Saint John the Baptist who came before our Lord Jesus Christ. Saint John the Baptist was very much like Elijah of Thesbis that is why the Scripture calls him "With the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1,17). Interpreting these words, Zigavinos and Origen say: "[The Scripture] named 'spirit' the spiritual gift, while power is the strength. It thus says that he has both the gift and the strength of Elijah".

As for us, who keep fervently the commemoration of the prophet Elijah, let us say along with the hymnographer: "compassionate Lord, grant Thy people remission of sins and the great mercy, by the intercessions of the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary and of the holy glorious prophet Elijah of Thesbis". Amen Many happy returns."

After the Divine Liturgy, the hard-working caretaker of the Monastery Monk Achillios hosted a reception and a rich banquet, with the help of the nuns of the Holy Monastery of the Ascension of the Lord.

From Secretariat-General