

THE FEASTS OF THE HOLY NEW MARTYR PHILOUMENOS AND OF THE APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST MATTHEW AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Wednesday, November 16/29, 2023, the Patriarchate celebrated the commemoration of the new Hieromartyr Philoumenos of the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood and of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew.

On this feast, the Church, especially that of Jerusalem, commemorates that on November 29, 1979, the Archimandrite Philoumenos, who served as the Hegoumen of Jacob's Well, found a martyr's death by an irreverent person next to Jacob's well, at the time of Vespers.

In honour of these two Saints, at Jacob's Well the Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Archimandrite Leontios with the co-celebration of Priests of this area, hosted by the Hegoumen and founder of the marvellous Cathedral dedicated to Saint Foteini the Samaritan woman, Archimandrite Ioustinos. The service was attended by only a few faithful Christians due to the ongoing hostilities.

For this feast, His Beatitude, our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos sent the following Sermon:

"If the world hates you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you...If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15,18-20), the Lord says.

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Reverend Christians,

The grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us all in this holy

place of the confession of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Samaritan woman that "the Messiah that is to come, I that speak unto thee am he" (c.f. John 4,25-26). This is also the place of the martyrdom of the confessor and martyr Philoumenos, and we have come to honour his commemoration.

The Hieromartyr Filoumenos emigrated from the island of Cyprus to the Holy Land and joined the monastic order of the Studios (Spoudaioi), i.e. the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood, he was distinguished by his devout zeal, his self-sacrificing ministry in the Holy Places and especially his care for our Christ-named flock, listening to the sermon of Saint Paul saying: "... Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1,28).

Just as the blessed Paul exhorted to always be a perfect man "in the virtues or in the knowledge of the mystery of Christ", as Zigavinos interprets, likewise, our Father Philoumenos did not stop instructing, that is advising and teaching every man, that Christ is the Saviour of the world, the truth and the light. And this is because, as Saint Chrysostom says, apart from Christ there is no perfection. "Perfect man, not in the [Mosaic] law, nor in angels, but in Christ."

His perfection in Christ, his union even after Christ, was achieved by Saint Philoumenos, becoming a co-witness of Christ's passion on the Cross, with the testimony of his blood, which [witness] was not accepted by his murderer. Paul saw the Lord in ecstasy saying to him: " Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me." (Acts 22,18).

Saint Philoumenos belongs to the cloud of martyrs (Heb. 12:1) of those who testified for the truth and for the Church of God, who was healed by his own blood" (Acts 20:28). This means that the glorious martyrdom of Christ is that which founded the Church of God, for the salvation of men. The Church of

Jerusalem rejoices in the Lord, because "it first accomplished redemption through His [Christ's] blood, the forgiveness of trespasses according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7). Saint John of Damascus praises this fact, saying: "Hail, holy Zion, Mother of the Churches of God's dwelling place, for thou wast the first to receive forgiveness of sins through the Resurrection."

In other words, the martyrdom of Saint Philoumenos is the testimony of the blood of Christ, which was given as a ransom and freed us from the captivity of our sins, extending over the centuries. Moreover, it is a testimony in the Holy Land of the Holy Shrines, which testify to the mystery of piety, of the incarnation, namely of the God, Word and our Saviour Christ, of His martyrdom on the Cross and of His Resurrection. The city of Jerusalem, watered with the holy blood of the Righteous One, that is, of our Saviour Christ, was transformed into an inexhaustible spring, gushing forth the divine blood of "the faithful and true witness of Christ" (Cf. Revelation 3:14).

This witness, " Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood", (Revelation 1,5), revealed the meaning of the unfathomable indeed mystery of the martyrdom of the Cross of our Saviour Christ, Whose (Christ's) every believer is called to imitate the martyrdom. " If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20) the Lord says.

Interpreting the above words of the Lord, Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: "... as if Christ had said: I am the Creator of all things and I have under my control all things, things in heaven and things on earth, I did not put a rein on their anger... but rather I allowed them to choose what seemed right to them, and to do whatever they wanted, even though I had the power to prevent this when I was being prosecuted. So, when

you were persecuted, you endured for a moment the aversion of those who hate you... and pursued the same ends that I pursued, that you might be partakers of the same glory. For those who sympathize with me will reign with me.”

This is precisely what the holy Hieromartyr Philoumenos, who is honoured today, sought, imitating Jesus Christ in sympathizing with Him and co-reigning with Him in Christ’s heavenly kingdom with all his co-martyrs and especially with the great martyr Foteini the Samaritan woman, to whom the Lord “sent His light and truth”, (Cf. Psalm 43,3).

We, my beloved brothers, beseech our Father Philoumenos, whose remaining incorruptible relics adorn the Church of Christ, so that his supplications and the intercessions of the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, may be deemed as Saint Paul says, “that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Eph. 4:1). May the peace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all those who love Him. Amen. Merry and blessed Christmas.

From Secretariat-General