

THREE-DAY CELEBRATIONS AT THE HOLY LAVRA OF SAINT SABBAS THE SANCTIFIED

From Sunday, December 4th / 17th 2023 to Tuesday, December 6th / 19th 2023, the celebrations of the Holy Lavra of Saint Sabbas the Sanctified took place. The Lavra is located on the right bank of the Brook Cedron, which leads to the Dead Sea.

This Lavra was founded by Saint Sabba as a Monastery for the hesychast monks. The Saint came to the Holy Land from Mutalaski in Cappadocia in AD 456 and apprenticed for twenty years to the saints Theoktistos and Euthymius the Great.

In this Lavra, the Saint directed thousands of monks to the life and salvation in Christ. He was distinguished as a fosterer of the monastic life, and after his compatriot Saint Theodosius the Cenobiarch, they steadfastly supported the doctrine of the two natures of Christ at the Fourth Ecumenical Synod of Chalcedon in AD 451. In the Monastery, his holy relic, returned from Venice in 1965, is preserved incorruptible. His Lavra was the beginning and prototype of hesychastic ecclesiastical life and the typicon of its Liturgical texts is used in all Orthodox Churches to this day.

For the celebrations, the High Priest of this year, His Eminence Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis went to the Lavra to officiate the Feast of Saint John of Damascus and Saint Barabara the Great Martyr at the chapel dedicated to Saint John of Damascus on Sunday, December 4/7, 2023.

The main feast of Saint Sabba the Sanctified: On Monday December 5/18, 2023, the All-night Vigil was presided over by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with the co-celebration of their Eminences, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina and Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Holy

Sepulchre Hieromonks and Priests from the Bethlehem and Galilee districts. The chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon and the Monastery Fathers on the right in Greek and by a Byzantine choir from Bethlehem on the left in Arabic, as the Vigil was attended by local faithful Christians.

His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon before the Holy Communion:

“I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore, my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Ps. 16,8-10), the psalmist proclaims.

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Reverend Fathers and Brothers,

Having become a vessel of the Holy Spirit, our Holy Father Sabbas has gathered us all in his blessed Lavra to celebrate his holy commemoration.

The God-minded Sabbas became a peer of the angels and dweller with the saints in the heights by the power of the Holy Spirit that was given to him. And this is so because like David he would say: “I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” (Ps. 16, 8). According to Saint Cyril of Skythopolis, our Holy Father Sabbas was predestined by God since the time he was in his mother’s womb, and had been foreknown before his body parts were formed, just like the Prophet Jeremiah: “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1,5).

In his holy calling, Saint Sabbas went through all the steps of the ladder of virtues, joining the holy and the righteous

saints of God of the monastic life, the citizens of the desert and great teachers of Palestine, Theodosius, Euthymius, Theoktistos and others. The striving Sabbas among the distinguished citizens of the desert would always pay heed to the words of the psalmist: "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Ps. 103, 17-18).

Through the keeping of God's commandments, both in words and actions, Saint Sabbas "crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5,24) and gained the virtues through which God received him in the divine heavenly courts according to the saying: "Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts" (Ps. 65,4). And the soul of the righteous man of God was not left in hell; neither did he see corruption (c.f. Ps. 16,10).

Behold, therefore, why Saint Sabbas was counted among the holy and the righteous men of God and was called "sanctified". He strove in every kind of asceticism, worked miracles, and surpassed everybody in perseverance. The true witness of this is his incorrupt and fragrant relic before our eyes.

In this relic, of Saint Sabbas the sanctified, we see the new man, who has put on Christ and has become a new creation according to God's will, so that we may live among people in righteousness, devotion, and holiness toward God. These virtues are the fruit of the truth of the Gospel, as Saint Paul urges: "Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4,24).

Interpreting these words of Paul, Zigavinos says: "The corrupt life is built in the devil...while the good and virtuous life is built in God, as God has created and made it legitimate". In other words, losing the image of God in us had as a result the

sin and misery of the fallen man. When we put on the new man, then the divine image which we have lost is restored in us, and this restoration is the Godly beauty of the soul, the glory and the holiness of the new man.

It is noteworthy that the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit, which enlightened our Holy Father Sabbas, has been extended to the ends of the world, therefore, he is recognized as an Apostle and preacher of the Gospel of truth: "Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world" (Romans 10,18), Saint Paul preaches, referring to the psalmist.

This is also confirmed by his biographer, Cyril of Skythopolis, who writes: "An angel on earth and a heavenly man, the wise Sabbas became a great teacher, defender of Orthodoxy and accuser of false doctrines, he became a faithful and prudent steward, multiplying the divine gifts, clad in power from on high by the goodwill of God the Father with the help of Christ and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he inhabited the desert with a multitude of monks and founded seven monasteries in it".

The Holy Church of the Orthodox Christians, especially the Church of Jerusalem, honours today the God-bearing Father Sabbas the Sanctified, who has boldness before Christ God. We honour him not only as a citizen of the desert but also as a fighter for the mystery of Providence. Let us entreat him, along with the intercessions of the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, to grant us peace for our souls, our tested region and the whole world. May we also celebrate the blessed Nativity of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ in the holy city of Bethlehem. Many happy returns!"

The Vigil was followed by a monastic meal.

Blessing the Fathers and accepting the thanks from them and their Spiritual Father Archimandrite Eudokimos, His Beatitude

returned to Jerusalem.

The feast of Saint Sabbas was also celebrated at the chapel dedicated to him inside the Holy Monastery of the Archangels in Jerusalem. The Divine Liturgy was officiated by Archimandrite Claudius and Priest Nectarios, in the presence of nuns and faithful Christians.

The feast of Saint Barbara the Great Martyr was also celebrated at the chapel dedicated to her inside the Holy Monastery of Saint Nikolaos in Jerusalem, with Vespers on Saturday afternoon and the Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning, led by Archimandrite Claudius and co-celebrated by Archdeacon Mark, who continues the renovation of the Church. The services were attended by faithful Christians from Jerusalem.

For the feast of Saint Nikolaos, at the Church dedicated to him, the first of the Lavra which is "built by God" according to Cyril of Skythopolis, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated on Tuesday, December 6/19, 2023, led by His Eminence Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, at the presence of faithful Christians. After the Divine Liturgy, there was a memorial service for the repose of the Lavra's departed Fathers, before Saint Sabba's Tomb and above the cemetery.

From Secretariat-General