

THE CEREMONY OF THE CUTTING OF THE NEW YEAR CAKE AT THE PATRIARCHATE

At 5:00 p.m. on December 31, 2023/January 13, 2024, the last day of the year 2023 (Old Calendar), the traditional ceremony of cutting the Vasilopita, the cake which tradition associates with the charitable action of Saint Basil the Great, took place in the hall of the Patriarchate.

Invited to this ceremony were the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem, Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos, the Consul, Ms Mantika Anna, and their collaborators, Holy Fathers and members of the Greek Parish and our Arabic-speaking flock.

In the beginning, His Beatitude spoke through His following address:

“And he [the Lord] said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power” (Acts 1,7).

Your Excellency Consul General of Greece Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos

Reverend Holy Fathers and Brothers,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

He who with unspeakable wisdom made all things, God the Word, and from non-being to being produced, brought us all to this holy place of the venerable Patriarchate of Jerusalem to thank God the Word for the beginning of the New Year of His goodness, and to honour the commemoration of our Father among the Saints Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia, through the established cutting of the New Year Cake under his name, “Vasilopita”.

The determination of the concept of historical time and its alternation in past and future, in outgoing and incoming, old and new, on the part of the human intellect of national pagans and philosophers in general, remains incomplete if not completely impossible.

On the contrary, the determination of historical time is made possible through the presence in the world of the incarnate God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, from the pure flesh of the Ever-Virgin Mary, during the reign of Caesar Augustus and the Governor of Cyrene of Syria, in the city of David called Bethlehem according to the testimony of the Evangelist Luke (cf. Luke 2, 1-5).

The established Father of the Church, Saint Cyril of Alexandria, commenting on the Lord's words to His disciples: "And he [the Lord] said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Acts 1,7), says, "it is not necessary to be curious about the classified and hidden in God, which the Lord was teaching".

Indeed, the consideration of time as past, present and future is an uninterpretable and incomprehensible fact, undisclosed and hidden in God. And this is because according to John of Damascus, "God from non-being into being produces and creates everything, invisible and visible, and man from the visible and invisible." And according to Saint Paul, "God, ...Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Hebrews 1,1-2).

Commenting on these words of Saint Paul, Theodoritos Kyrou says: "Aeon is not a substance but an inherent thing, which accompanies the beings that have a created nature...Aeon is the space, which is connected with the created nature. The Scripture says the Son (of God) is the creator of the ages. He is eternal, teaching us that He has always been above all

temporal systems.

According to Saint Basil the Great, time is interconnected with the world's creation. "And when now the time came to introduce this world into the beings...then the foundation of the world was built, inherent in the world...a stream that constantly hastens and runs sideways towards them, and nowhere ends its course. Or is not time something of which the past has disappeared, and the future has not yet appeared, and the present, before it is well perceived, immediately escapes the grasp of sense?"

Following Saint Basil the Great, Saint John of Damascus says that *aion* is that which was extended along with the eternal beings like a movement of time or like a space in time; and for this reason eternal, as God is called eternal, but also pre-eternal...I say, God, that is, the Father and His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, His Holy Spirit, our one God.

This God of our Lord Jesus Christ put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of all things in all things completed (c.f. Eph. 1,22-23), Saint Paul preaches. This means that the Church, being the body of Christ is not from this world (John 8,23), but since it exists in this historical time, it celebrates the change of the year, not in a worldly manner, but spiritually, showing that it exists in the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Therefore, in the Church and through the Church of Christ, time is interpreted as a new creation by the Apostle Paul. "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5,17-18). We become communicants of this newness in Christ when we participate in the Sacrament of

the Holy Eucharist, where Christ dwells in our hearts (c.f. Eph. 3,17). "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6,56).

Moreover, time becomes the time of life eternal during baptism, where we receive the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and put on Christ. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3,27), Saint Paul preaches. This time of the gift of the seal of the Holy Spirit was granted to us by God the Father, so that we may cleanse ourselves from any defilement and become pleasant to God, just like the Apostle Barnabas says, "we should avoid the present situations and examine the times, flee completely from all the works of iniquity, lest the works of iniquity overtake us; and let us hate the deceit of the present time, that in the future we may be loved."

It becomes clear that the alternation of the Ecclesiastical year, i.e. the time, does not concern the distinction of hours, day and night, but to the "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20,21) according to the Evangelist Luke. About this, Saint Paul says, "For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6,2).

At the time of the change of the year, where apostasy and iniquity abound, and humanity is tested by wars, strife and "every evil thing" (cf. James 3:16), we too should reflect on our transgressions, and in fear and terror work out our salvation (cf. Philippians 2:12).

As we celebrate the dawn of the new year, in Christ, God the Word, the Incarnate by the pure flesh of the most blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, let us entreat Saint Basil the Great Hierarch of Cappadocia, to intercede for our souls, the peace of the whole world, especially for the tested Gaza strip and the wider region of the Middle East, as well as for every

kind of schism and the healing of the torn unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church.

And let us say along with the Hymnographer: “Thou Who hast framed all things by Thine ineffable wisdom, O Christ God the Word, and hast established times and seasons for our sakes: bless the works of Thy hands.” (Minaion Sept. 1st, Matins, praises, both now). Thou Who art full of goodness, bless this year and protect in peace and unity Thine Church, our Venerable Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood, our reverend Christian flock, the Holy City of Jerusalem, and our pious nation of the Rum Orthodox. Amen. Blessed and peaceful New Year, 2024. Many Happy Returns!”

Afterwards, the apolytykion of the Circumcision was chanted and of Basil the Great. Then His Beatitude cut the cake, wishing a happy, blessed and peaceful New Year 2024 and distributed it to those present.

Finally, the students of the Patriarchal School of Zion sang the carols, “we are the New Generation of the Holy Sepulchre” in the Patriarchate, in the homes of the Holy Sepulchre Fathers and the homes of members of the Greek Parish.

From Secretariat-General