

THE SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Sunday, February 20/March 5, 2023, the Sunday of Orthodoxy was celebrated by the Patriarchate at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

On this Sunday, the First of the Fast of Holy and Great Lent, the whole Church commemorates and celebrates the restoration of the holy icons, their restoration to the Church under Empress Theodora and her son Michael after the persecution and destruction, they suffered under the impious iconoclast emperors Leo the Isauros and the husband of Saint Theodora Theophilos.

This restoration of the icons in the Church is considered a victory for Orthodoxy, that is, as a victory for the truth, because the icons depict the earthly presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. By decision of the empress Saint Theodora from the year 842 and henceforth, the icons were established again in the Church, not to be worshipped, as the iconoclasts claim, but to render worship to the Holy Trinity and honour to the Theotokos and the Saints through them.

In honour of the Holy icons of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Mother of God and the Saints, Great Vespers was celebrated on Saturday afternoon, after incense and the blessing of bread in the Catholicon of the Church of the Resurrection presided over by His Beatitude, our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos.

On the morning of the feast, the Divine Liturgy at the Catholicon of the Church of the Resurrection was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with the co-celebration of their Eminences, Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias and the Archbishops, Theophanes of Gerassa,

Aristarchos of Constantina, Theodosios of Sebasteia, Demetrios of Lydda, Makarios of Qatar, and Aristovoulos of Madaba, the Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios, Archimandrite Dometian from the Church of Russia and Archimandrite Ioannis from the Church of Romania, Archdeacon Mark and other Deacons. The chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon and Mr Gotsopoulos with the Patriarchal School Students, as the service was attended by faithful Christians from Jerusalem and pilgrims and the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras.

After the Divine Liturgy there was a litany three times around the Sacred Edicule and then around the shrines, followed by the reading of the Gospel narrative of the day before the Holy Sepulchre, and the reading of the Synodical of Orthodoxy, with the anathema of those denying the holy icons and all heretics, and the beatitudes of those who venerate them. These were followed by the return to the Patriarchate Headquarters.

There, His Beatitude addressed those present as follows:

“He who is invisible in His eternal and divine nature took flesh from thy pure body, O Virgin, in His great compassion, and became visible as a mortal man. Therefore, we depict His flesh in ikons which we venerate and honour with reverence and true faith” (Small Vespers, Theotokion).

Beloved brothers in Christ,

Reverend Christians and pilgrims,

Today appears to be a day of cheerfulness and joy. The feast of Orthodoxy, as our holy Church commemorates the restoration of the holy and sacred icons, made by the late emperors of Constantinople, Michael and his mother Theodora, on the Patriarchal Office of the holy confessor Methodius.

Today’s feast of the restoration of the Holy Icons, which we celebrated with thanksgiving at the Holy Church of the

Resurrection, is not only about the triumph of Orthodoxy, but mainly and primarily about the confession of faith in the ineffable mystery, both of the Incarnation of God from the pure blood of the Virgin Mary, and the depiction of the faces of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.

That is why Saint Anastasios of Sinai also says: "How can it be believed that [Christ] was taken up in the flesh from the Holy Virgin if He was not represented to us"?

St. John of Damascus, responding to the detractors, i.e. the critics of the worship of "the icon of our Saviour and Lady, invokes the words of the approved Father of the Church Basil the Great: "the honour of the icon over the original is passed on". "There God" adds John the Damascene, "through his tender mercies he truly became a man for today's salvation, not as in Abraham he came in the form of a man, not as in the prophets, but in essence, he made a true event that was not a man on the earth 'and with the people he was acquainted '" (Baruch 3,37).

The restoration of the Holy icons in AD 842 from the reverend empress Theodora and the Patriarch Methodius the Confessor is of great importance for Christ's Church, they preserved the intact and uninitiated the truth of our Orthodox faith.

In other words, this historical event of the restoration and veneration of the Holy icons is the one that sealed the victory of the Orthodox faith against the invisible or better said its now visible and variously named wars. For we are called to remain firm and unmoved in the Apostolic Tradition and the faith of our Holy Fathers, listening to the order of Saint Paul to his disciple Timothy: "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:12). Amen. Many happy returns and blessed the stage of the Holy Lent".

From Secretariat-General