

THE FEAST OF PROPHET ELIJAH AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Sunday, July 20/August 2, 2020, the Patriarchate celebrated the commemoration of the Holy Prophet Elijah the Thesbite at his old holy Monastery which is located midway on the central road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

On this feast Prophet Elijah is alive in the memory of the Church as referred to his apolytikion : “the incarnate Angel and the Prophets’ summit and boast, the second forerunner of the coming of Christ our God, Elijah the glorious...he doth cast out sickness and doth also cleanse lepers; and unto all that honour him he poureth forth streams of cures”. He was born in Thesbes that’s why he is called Thesbite, he lived an ascetic simple life, dressed in a fleece, full of Godly zeal and was a fervent defender of the Name and rights of the only true God, “ he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit”(James 5:17-18).

With his prayer, Prophet Elijah made fire from heaven come down on mount Carmel and burnt down the wood of the altar and confounded the priests of shame whom he later slaughtered at brook Kishon (3 Kings ch. 18).

It is believed that the Prophet slept under a juniper tree at the place of this Monastery, and an angel left food for him and told him “Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.” Persecuted by Jezebel he retreated to brook Chorath where God sent a crow to bring him bread in the morning and meat in the evening (3 Kings 17-19:).

In this monastery Vespers was held in the afternoon by His Eminence Archbishop Theophylaktos of Jordan and Patriarchal Representative in Bethlehem. The Divine Liturgy in the morning was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos with co-celebrants their Eminences the Archbishops: Aristarchos of Constantine, Methodios of Tabor, and Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, only twelve Priests inside the Church with first in rank Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios, and around twenty faithful outside according to the Police instructions due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Some more came in the end to honour the "second forerunner of the coming of Christ, Elijah the glorious", under the chanting of His Eminence Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba in Greek on the right and St. James Cathedral choir in Arabic on the left under the lead of Mr. Rimon Kamar.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude read the following Sermon:

"As a seer of God, the Thesbite with Moses beholdeth upon Tabor that which eye hath not seen nor ear heard, and which the heart of earthborn men hath not considered, even the Almighty Lord incarnate" the hymnographer of the Church proclaims (Minaion July 20, Matins, ode 9, troparion 3).

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians,

The holy and reverend commemoration of the Holy glorious Prophet Elijah the Thesbite has gathered us today at his sacred Church, in order to honour his feast in Eucharist. The presence of Prophet Elijah and his active prophetic preaching take place at a crucial time, during which the people of God who follow the Law of Moses, which was given to them on Mount Sinai, have distanced themselves from the healthy faith and worship of the revealed "religion" of the moral monotheism, and have joined the fallacy of idolatry and syncretism. The

gloomy picture of the deviation of the Old Testament people from the path of the knowledge of God and the pure worship is described by St. Chrysostom by saying: "For it was night, which had covered the whole Universe; a thick cloud had covered the whole world. Everybody advanced in the works of evil; it was a universal wreck, not because of waters but because of lewdness (P.G. Minge 50, 729).

The Holy Prophet Elijah righteously received the name "zealot" as St. Chrysostom also says: "he was getting drunk by the zeal". Elijah acquired this excessive zeal for God paying heed to God's commandments: "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might"(Deuteronomy 6:5), and by David's words: "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour"(Psalm 15:1-3).

The self-willed and unconditional obedience of God-minded Elijah to God's will made him "a man of God" and that is why he was appointed with the divine mission of the awakening and the repentance of both the people and their religious-political leaders.

And this mission through the prophetic actions of zealot Elijah aimed at the preservation of the promises of God to Abraham and of the Covenant which God made available to their Fathers (Acts 3:25). In other words, the mission of Elijah the Thesbite aimed at the reminding "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath"(Hebrews 6:17) according to St. Paul. And we must consider as "heirs of the promise" both the peoples of the Old and the New Testament, according to St. Paul's words: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"(Galatians 3:29). And according to Zigavinos the

interpreter; "heirs of the promise are the old people by nature, and the new by spirit; because those who are close by nation are the natural seed of Abraham, but those who become similar to him according to faith are close to him through spirit."

It is made clear that the prominent character and the prophetic action of Elijah are owed to his words and actions as witnessed in both the Old and the New Testament.

And in the New Testament Elijah the Thesbite appears along with Prophet Moses next to Christ on His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, becoming His witness and conversing with Him: "And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him"(Matthew 17:3). Moreover, St. James the Brother of God while praising the prayer of the righteous says about Elijah: "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months"(James 5:17).

While in the Old Testament, glorious Elijah is shown as a chosen vessel of God, equal to the Apostle of the Nations Paul. The action of the power of faith of his godly zeal and wondrous works are precisely described by the holy writer of wisdom of Sirach as follows;

"Then the prophet Elijah arose like a 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, O Elijah, in your wondrous deeds! And who has the right to boast which you have? You who raised a corpse from death and from Hades, by the word of the Most High; who brought kings down to destruction, and famous men from their beds; who heard rebuke at Sinai and judgments of vengeance at Horeb; who anointed kings to inflict retribution, and prophets to succeed you. You who were taken

up by a whirlwind of fire, in a chariot with horses of fire; you who are ready[b] at the appointed time, it is written, to calm the wrath of God before it breaks out in fury, to turn the heart of the father to the son, and to restore the tribes of Jacob. Blessed are those who saw you, and those who have been adorned[c] in love; for we also shall surely live”(Wisdom Sirach 48:1-11).

To this indeed befitting praise of prophet Elijah the Thesbite by the God-inspired Sirach, Father Joel Gianakopoulos says regarding the last sentence “for we also shall surely live”: “Here we should think about the righteous who will die during the last days of the world. Prepared by Elijah’s preaching, they will die peacefully and will be resurrected during the Judgment of the World which will take place at that time, and will live eternally”.

Today’s honoured God-seer Prophet Elijah the Thesbite had a peaceful death, he had the death of the righteous as the psalmist says: “God shall redeem my soul out of the hand of hades when he receiveth me”(Psalm 48:16) and “But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them”(Wisdom of Solomon 3:1).

My brethren, let us entreat Elijah who has great boldness to the Trinitarian God and along with the hymnographer say: “O Elijah, thou Prophet and herald of Christ, at no time art thou ever separated from the throne of majesty, yet thou art ever present at the side of every one in sickness; while ministering in the highest, thou dost bless the whole world and art every-where glorified. Ask thou forgiveness of our souls” (Vespers aposticha glory). Amen.”

After dismissal a simple reception was offered by the Hegoumen Archimandrite Paissios.

From Secretariat-General

