

SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY AT THE PATRIARCHATE

Sunday 8/21 March 2021 was celebrated as the Sunday of Orthodoxy by the Patriarchate, the victory of the restoration of the holy icons, as established by the Triodion of the Church according to the 7th Ecumenical Synod (AD 787) with the contribution of Empress Theodora, her son Mihail and of Patriarch Methodios of Constantinople.

1. Vespers

This feast was celebrated by the Patriarchate as 'Parresia' (boldness) according to the Status Quo, at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with Great Vespers on Saturday afternoon. The ninth hour was read at the Church of Saints Constantine and Helen before the Patriarchal Entourage was welcomed at the Holy Deposition of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, with the incense offering procedure. This was followed by the veneration of the All-holy Tomb and the Horrendous Golgotha by the Archbishops and the members of the Holy Synod, the incense offering around the Shrines, the Great Entrance and the Blessing of Bread. The Service was led in prayer by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with the co-prayer of the Archbishops in the Holy Altar, the Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and Deacons. The chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon on the right and Mr Vasilios Gotsopoulos on the left, at the presence of the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras and a few Nuns due to covid-19 restrictions.

2. On the Feast Day

On Sunday of Orthodoxy, the Divine Liturgy was officiated at the Catholicon of the Church of the Resurrection, by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos. Co-

celebrants to His Beatitude were their Eminences: Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, the Archbishops; Theophanes of Gerassa, Aristarchos of Constantina, Theodosios of Sebastia, Demetrios of Lydda, Philoumenos of Pela and Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and Deacons with first in rank Elder Kamarasis Nectarios. The chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon on the right and Mr Vasilios Gotsopoulos on the left, at the presence of the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras and a few Nuns and faithful Christians.

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a procession with the holy icons three times around the Sacred Edicule and then around the shrines and concluded with the reading of the Synodical memorial service in Greek and in Arabic of those who venerate the holy icons and the anathema of their opposers.

Bells tolling, the Patriarchal Entourage and the congregation returned to the Patriarchate Reception Hall, where His Beatitude addressed those present as follows:

“Celebrate, rejoice the people of Christ, seeing the Church shining by the form of the divine beauty; which God put upon Himself as man, in order to save us,” Saint Theodore of the Studion says. (Triodion, Sunday of Orthodoxy, Matins, Ode 7, Troparion 3).

Beloved Brethren,

Your Excellency Consul General of Greece Mr Evangelos Vlioras,

Noble Christians

Today the Holy Church of the Orthodox Christians celebrates the restoration of the holy icons by the memorable Sovereigns of Constantinople Mihail and Theodora his mother, along with the Holy Patriarch of Constantinople and Confessor Methodios.

This event of the restoration of the holy icons is a historic

landmark in Church life. Because, after the passing of just over three centuries of the formation of the doctrine regarding the Divine Providence, which is the beyond nature union of the divine with the human nature in our Lord Jesus Christ, the weeds of Nestorianism sprang forth, along with their derivatives, Monophysitism and Monothelitism.

The icons depict the incarnation of God the Word in essence, as Saint Theodore of the Studion says: "The uncircumscribed Word of the Father became circumscribed, taking flesh from thee, O Theotokos, and He has restored the sullied image to its ancient glory, filling it with the divine beauty. This our salvation we confess in deed and word, and we depict in it the holy icons" (Kontakion of Sunday of Orthodoxy).

The restoration of the icons is a confession of our salvation in Christ, through Christ. The restoration, or rather the veneration of the holy icons does not refer to their material part, but to the depicted person or Biblical event; "We do not offer worship to the material thing. The honour of the icon is attributed to the prototype", Saint John Damascene teaches, referring to the words of the Great Church Father, Saint Basil.

In other words, the honour we offer to the icons is attributed to the person depicted, the prototype. This truth was proclaimed by the God-bearing Fathers of the Church in the Ecumenical Synod of Nice, where they decided that those who kiss the icon and honourably worship it receive sanctification. "Those of us who offer our worship only to God, also have the hope of receiving the sanctification from all those material things that are dedicated to Him, whether they are a divine type of the Holy Cross, the Holy Gospel, the sacred icons, or the sacred utensils, and we kiss and embrace them" (Mansi 13,269,309).

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). However, honourably, we

also venerate all the created things through which God worked our salvation, as for example, the manger, the Cave, the place of the Crucifixion and of the three-day Burial and Resurrection, as well as everything that is dedicated to God. "Not for their nature, but because they are vessels of the Divine energy...and angels, and people and every material creation that has become a vessel of the Divine energy, and has served for my salvation, I respect and venerate for the Divine energy that exists in them" Saint John Damascene teaches in precision (PG. 94, 1353).

By the Divine Grace, surrounded by the reverend members of our Hagiotaphite Brotherhood, Archbishops, Hieromonks and Deacons, we have celebrated the great sacrament of the Holy Eucharist and held a procession with the holy icons and the Sacred Cross at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, proclaiming thus the redeeming glory of the impeccable Orthodox Faith. Moreover, we prayed before the All-holy and Life-giving Tomb for the unity of the Orthodox Churches and for the liberation of humanity from the deadly infectious covid-19 disease.

We wish you many happy returns and a blessed Easter. Amen."

From Secretariat-General