

THE FEAST OF THE HOLY CHIEFS OF THE APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL

On Thursday June 29/July 12, 2018, the Patriarchate celebrated the commemoration of the Holy and Glorious and All-lauded Chiefs of the Apostles, Peter and Paul at the Holy Monastery dedicated to them, which has been built by the memorable Patriarch of Jerusalem Damascene at the north-west bank of the Sea of Tiberias.

The Divine Liturgy was celebrated for this feast, officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos with co-celebrants the Most Reverend Archbishops; Aristarchos of Constantina and Secretary-General, Makarios of Qatar, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, Arab-speaking Priests from the neighbouring parishes, and Archdeacon Mark. Archimandrite Philotheos and his choir delivered the hymns, and the service was attended by a congregation of pilgrims and local faithful from the Galilee district. His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon;

“A joyous feast hath shone unto the uttermost parts of the earth today, even the all-august memorial of the most wise Apostles, the Chiefs Peter and Paul. Therefore Rome danceth and rejoiceth with them. Let us also, O brethren, joyously celebrate with songs and hymns this most venerable day, saying: Rejoice, O Peter, Apostle and true friend of thy Teacher, Christ our God. Rejoice most dearly beloved Paul, preacher of the Faith and teacher of the whole world. O holy and elect yoke-fellows, since ye have boldness, entreat Christ our God that our souls be saved” the Bishop of the Church

Efraim from Karia says.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims,

The citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, Peter the rock of faith and Paul the preacher of the Church, the two men that shone forth by the grace of the Holy Trinity, the vessels of the Holy Spirit, have gathered all of us in this sacred shrine of Capernaum in order to honour their commemoration in Eucharist.

The Holy Apostles Peter and Paul are distinguished among the other Apostles because they have been elected by our Lord Jesus Christ to be chosen vessels, stewards of the mysteries of God and teachers of the whole world. Their holy and God-inspired epistles and letters are the irrefutable and non-negotiable consignment they have given to us men "who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 5-9) St. Peter teaches.

In other words, the final glory, our salvation, is ensured through the sorrows of the present life. And in these sorrows and testing we have the Holy Spirit as a helper, according to St. Paul's teaching by saying: "For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly

waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:22-23). "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26).

Our Lord Jesus Christ, my dear brothers, came into the world to liberate man from the bondage of sin, namely from the darkness of ignorance and fallacy; and to lead man into the truth of freedom. The Lord says; "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37). (And everyone who is willing to learn the truth, hears and comprehends my voice and teaching and through its application he becomes a citizen of my spiritual and heavenly Kingdom).

To this voice of witness of the truth and witness of the Lord did the Holy Apostles hearken, and especially Peter and Paul among them. For this reason the Lord says to Peter; "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:17-18). And Paul, who has been called a chosen vessel (Acts 9:15) says: "[I] was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor. 12:4). The Lord said to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (1 Cor. 12:9).

The salvific mystery of the divine providence in Christ, my dear ones, is prolonged in the world throughout the centuries through the Church, the mystical body of Christ, and by the eye-witnesses and servants of the divine word (Luke 1:2). And these eye-witnesses and servants of the divine word, namely of the preaching of the gospel, are the Apostles and their

successors, the spiritual shepherds and teachers of the Church, the workers and ministers in the Lord's vineyard. They are the ones who continue the mission of Jesus Christ and of His Apostles on earth by the grace of the Holy Spirit, according to their advice; "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

Christ's gospel preaching refers to the perfection of our Christian faith, whose motivation is and should be the salvation of our souls. "For now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:11-12), St. Paul preaches.

And the first among the Apostles, Peter, calls the faithful to have Christ, the leader of their lives, as an example to imitate. "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:21-22).

Let us entreat the Holy men of Christ, Peter and Paul, who we commemorate festively today, so that by their intercessions, along with those of the Most Blessed Theotokos, our Lady and Ever-Virgin Mary, we may be granted the mercy and compassion of Christ our Lord and God and Saviour. Amen.

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a monastic reception and then an outdoor lunch with fish, offered by the renovator of the Monastery Hegoumen Eirinarchos.

From Secretariat-General

