

GREAT FESTIVE VESPERS OF THE INAUGURATION OF THE HOLY CHURCH OF ST GEORGE IN OLD CAIRO

Two days of celebrations were held in the God-trodden Holy Monastery of St George in Old Cairo, on the occasion of the Inauguration of the full refurbished Church, known as the "Rotunda" of the East.

On the evening of 23rd April 2015, Great Vespers was served, officiated by His Eminence Chrysostomos Metropolitan of Kition, representative of His Beatitude the Archbishop of Cyprus, together in the Holy Sanctuary with His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa and the honorary invited for the celebrations Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens and All Greece and in the presence of most of the Hierarchs of the Alexandrian Throne, Mr and Mrs Athanasios and Marina Martinou (donors of the renovation expenses), the Archon Office-bearers, many groups from Greece, Cyprus and South Africa and many faithful. The Psalters had firstly a choir of Fathers from the Vatopaidi Monastery chanting in Greek and a choir of seminarians from the Balamand Theological School in Lebanon, chanting in Arabic.

Prior to the dismissal of Vespers, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, performed the Sanctification and read the Sanctifying prayers of the Inauguration of the Holy Church of St George, the historic "Rotunda", which encompasses the Martyrdom of St George the Great and Triumphant Martyr, as well as the tombs of the Patriarchs of Alexandria, which was delivered again for Divine Worship, after four years of renovation works and operations throughout the building complex.

After the end of the Festive Vespers, in the courtyard of the Monastery a music concert was held, consisting of two programmes. The famous Egyptian Musician Omar Khairat began, followed by the musical programme of the internationally renowned Greek from Egypt Dimitris Papadimitriou. During the event and in front of the crowded audience, His Beatitude awarded the Great Cross of the Apostle Mark to Mr. Athanasios Martinos and his wife Marina Martinou with the Supreme Commander of the Apostle Mark.

Visibly moved, His Beatitude gave the following address:

ADDRESS BY HIS BEATITUDE THEODOROS II OF ALEXANDRIA AT THE MUSICAL EVENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE INAUGURATION OF THE HOLY PATRIARCHAL MONASTERY OF ST GEORGE

The famous physicist Einstein said that there are only two ways to live your life. One is to live as though nothing is a miracle. The other is to live as though everything is a miracle.

And today we have gathered here to celebrate with exquisite music, as the Alexandrian Poet would say, the miracle of the Holy Monastery of St George. A miracle, because this Monastery circumvented the natural laws of time and continues its journey through the ages. A miracle, because for centuries now, this Monastery unites the earthly and the heavenly. A miracle, because for centuries now, this Monastery unites nations, languages and devotions. A miracle, because for centuries now, this Monastery breaks the barrier of the dividing wall and makes brothers and sisters through love.

The Parthenon of Christianity in Egypt, has regained its original beauty. The bastion of faith has thrown off its signs of aging. The evergreen tree of God's love has blossomed again. The compass of Orthodoxy has been rewound and continues to give a meaning to life to every receptive heart which beats in our sweet

homeland of Egypt.

I have not been accustomed in my life to waiting inactively and depressed behind closed doors. I knock on doors and bravely let the voice of my heart be heard. My voice was heard. Both President Sisi as well as Prime Minister Mahleb believed in my vision and facilitated my efforts. In return today I offer them a monument of faith and global culture; an oasis for soul and spirit in the heart of the Egyptian capital; a treasure well-hidden in old Cairo; an open invitation to a journey through time, from the ancient Nile metre to the catacombs and from the Rotunda to the paintings of Parthenis.

And along came Thanasi Martinos with the abundance of his believing heart to once again unite the countries which are separated by the Mediterranean but are united in history.

And his generosity revived the times of the great benefactors. With his magnanimity he restored another monument-symbol of two ancient cultures, the Egyptian and the Greek. He fanned the flames of the Lighthouse of memory and faith which has illumined Ecumenical Orthodoxy from the first Christian centuries right up until the century of St Nektarios and the dawn of the third millennium after Christ.

In the volume written about the first ten years of my Patriarchal tenure, it was characteristically mentioned that the restoration of St George is the pinnacle of my renovation efforts. Let us rather say that it is one more pinnacle. There remain many other pinnacles in the transient life of him who addresses you to conquer to the glory of the Lord.

There may be many deep wrinkles on my forehead, but they are not etched on my heart. My heart remains young, just as it was when I was beginning my priestly journey forty years ago in Crete. And just as it did then, my heart yearns for just one thing: to ground my existence as love for God and man; to exist only because I love. Amen!