

HIS BEATITUDE AT THE HOLY MONASTERY OF VATOPEDI

His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, made a pilgrimage visit from 16th to 18th May 2014 to the Holy Monastery of Vatopedi, in order to conduct the Holy Celebrations on the occasion of the 300th anniversary (1714-2014) of the passing of Patriarch Saint Gerasimos Palladas of Alexandria, accompanied by their Eminences Alexios of Carthage and Nikiphoros of Central Africa, the Very Reverend Archimandrite Meletios Koumanis, Hegumen of the Holy Patriarchal Monastery of St Savvas the Sanctified in Alexandria, Presbyter Athynodoros Papaevripiades, His Beatitude's Representative in Cyprus, Professor Thodoros Panagopoulos, Chairman of the Brotherhood of Office Bearers of the Patriarchate and Mr. Anestis Arnopoulos, Archon Referendarios of the Throne.

His Beatitude entered Agion Oros on 16th May. He was welcomed, according to the Typikon of the Holy Mountain, in Karyes by His Eminence Apostolos Metropolitan of Militos, representative of His Most Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios, the Holy Supervisors under the Senior Supervisor Stefanos of Hilandarion, the representatives of the Holy Monasteries and the Civil Director of the Holy Mountain Mr. A. Kasmiroglou. O Doxology was sung at the Protato, while in the guest hall of the Holy Community, following the treats, His Beatitude had the opportunity of mentioning the contribution of the Holy Mountain to the great missionary efforts undertaken in Africa. Many monks and hieromonks coming from the Holy Monastery and Sketes on Athos, three of them Bishops, give daily witness of Orthodoxy, preaching work and love, baptising many African brothers and sisters. in the name of the Holy Trinity. His Beatitude then went on to visit Cells in Karyes, among which was the Holy Cell of St. Nicholas Bourazeri.

On the afternoon of the same day His Beatitude arrived at the Holy Great Monastery of Vatopedi, where with grandeur he was welcomed by the Hegumen of the Holy Monastery and the entire Brotherhood. The next morning, Saturday 17th May, His Beatitude visited the Holy Monastery of Hiliandari to venerate the miraculous icon of the Most Holy Virgin Tricheroussa, and in the afternoon he conducted the vigil in memory of St Gerasimos Palladas.

When the vigil ended on the morning of Sunday 18th May, the first volume of the "Apanta", the literary work of the Saint, was presented in the Great Hall of the Monastery, and the publication of which was undertaken mutually by the Holy Great Monastery of Vatopedi and the Society for the Distribution of Beneficial Books. On the occasion of the presentation His Beatitude spoke appropriately, as follows:

Rejoice O divine shoot of Crete and wondrous Patriarch of Alexandria; Rejoice the great sacrament solemniser of piety and new prize of the faith, Gerasimos.

Most Reverend Archimandrite Fr. Ephraim, Hegumen of the Great Monastery of Vatopedi on the Holy Mountain,

Dear Fathers and Brothers,

With sacred emotion and unspeakable joy we are here today as pious pilgrims at the respected and vaunted Holy Great Monastery of Vatopedi, in this celebrated palladium of the Merciful Theotokos to venerate the miraculous Holy Belt of the Most Blessed among women, as well as the holy relics of the saints, which are treasured for centuries of veneration in the valuable reliquary of this Holy Monastery and to receive their illuminating and sanctifying joy for the strengthening and success of our multi-responsible Patriarchal ministry.

Among these holy relics, which are kept in this hive of peaceful souls which are raised to God, the Holy Saint's head of our Father among the Saints Gerasimos of Pallada, Patriarch of Alexandria is distinguished and fills with its inner grace those who venerate it in faith. It is with particular honour that the Second Throne Church of the East which is completed today here through communion from the Common Cup of Life, in his memory, honours him from the well-governed island of Crete, great in wisdom and in virtues shown, our predecessor, on the occasion of the

three-hundredth anniversary of his passing.

The Apostolic Throne of St Mark, the ancient Church of Alexandria, from its inception, has been blessed by God in this manner, in that armies of martyrs, confessors, ascetics and saints have come from its bosom, bearing the marks of Christ's Life and Death. The entire Orthodox Church honours and celebrates the saints; because through them is everything and all in Christ. In a similar manner, the Alexandrian Church honours, magnifies and takes pride in its saints. The Holy Patriarchs of Alexandria make up the pride of our martyred Alexandrian Church and operate as far-shining lighthouses, filled with sanctity, for the daily lives of many faithful, as well as of those shepherds of our Patriarchate.

A glorious position among these Patriarchal Saints is held by St Gerasimos Palladas. From a young age following the Gospel of Christ, and amidst the confusion of the world, shining as a luminary of piety, God-inspired in his teachings, and living his life in words of wisdom and God-loving acts, teaching the faithful education according to God and becoming an example thereof in word and deed and behaviour, he recreated in them the merits of the ancient Holy Fathers and Teachers.

Championing the rights of the measure of the universe, the God-guarded See of Alexandria, in difficult times, with boldness and courage, with prudence and fortitude, maintaining and preserving night and day the flock entrusted to him, he was proved to be a worthy successor of his predecessor Patriarchs, Ioacheim Oanis, Meletios Pigas and Kyrillos Loukaris. Ignoring pain, sadness and multiple dangers, he kept the rudder of the Alexandrian ship steady and in a God-like manner sailed through the salty seas of the difficult and burdensome years of the slavery of the Orthodox family. A loving and energetic worker of literature and the preaching of the divine word, he delivered unscathed and unaltered the paternal ecclesiastic heritage to his successors and to the suffering people of God.

The spirit-filled Saint and Patriarch of Alexandria Gerasimos Palladas, passed on ascetically three centuries ago in this Great Monastery of Vatopedi on Mount Athos. What remains though, is his holy example to the Alexandrian Church, which is proud in the Lord for its Patriarch and Shepherd, praying that from the Church Triumphant he will intercede to the Most Gracious Lord and Lover of Mankind, to strengthen the vessel of our Church and enlighten clergy and laity.

Most Holy Hegumen,

Grateful thanks are due to you because you maintain this your Holy Monastery protected by the Theotokos as a far-shining lighthouse for those suffering in life, a shameless protection of the persecuted, an unending source of charity for the poor and an unremunerated clinic for souls and bodies of the afflicted. You maintain unadulterated the holy and valuable of our immaculate faith, and inexhaustible the source of our paternal traditions and unchanged the Orthodox conviction on the Holy Mountain. You nurture this luxuriant vineyard, which yields many sweet vines, such as holy contenders and hieromartyr monks, who surpassed and reconstructed the forms of history to the glory and pride of the Saint-bearing Mountain.

It is also worthy that we remember gratefully your prayerful, ethical, and material support, profusely given to the missionary effort of the Church of the Evangelist Mark, which self-sacrificially witnesses on the African continent to Christ, the Crucified and Risen and always present in the Eucharistic life of the Church.

For all of this we give glory to the Triune God, who deemed us worthy to commune with you and to participate in this feast of faith and memory. We pray that you will always have as a guardian of your souls and of your Holy Monastery, the blessing of the Mother of God, her protection and her care, so that you may continue unhindered and productively your noble and God-loved efforts and ministry. We pray also that we all are worthy of the intercession of the delightful bud of Crete, the blossom of Alexandria, the wise interpreter, the most holy vessel of

inspiration of the Spirit, who gives flight to the flowers of God's wisdom, of our Holy Father among the Saints, Gerasimos, Pallads, Patriarch of Alexandria.

Holy Father, receive our divine illumination completely, give also to us all who love your innermost merits, so that we may continue to labour tirelessly in the fields of faith. Amen!

In conclusion, His Beatitude awarded the Great Cross of St Mark to the Hegumen of the Monastery, Archimandrite Ephraim and a meeting followed between His Beatitude with a great number of Monks of the Monastic Community. On the afternoon of Sunday 18th May, His Beatitude addressed spiritual words to the Synaxis of the Holy Brotherhood of the Vatopedi Monastery, placing before them his long personal experience of Missionary work in Africa. His Beatitude departed from the Holy Mountain on Monday 19th May.