

HIS BEATITUDE IN ATHENS

On Friday 30th April 2010, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa arrived in Athens from Alexandria, to deal with current issues of the Throne. He was welcomed at the Athens International Airport by His Eminence Metropolitan George of Zimbabwe, his representative in Athens, and Archimandrite Vasilios Barbelis, Secretary of the Athens Office.

HIS BEATITUDE IN SPATA

On Sunday 2nd May 2010, at the Metropolitan Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos in Spata, in the framework of the functions of the Municipality of Spata and the Holy Metropolis of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki, for the late Protopresbyter Elias Bertolis, a pioneer of land distribution to the landless of Spata and Missionary in South Africa, His Beatitude officiated at the Divine Liturgy conducted by the Hegumen of the Holy Monastery of Esfigmenou, Archimandrite Chrysostomos. Together with him were Their Eminences George, Metropolitan of Zimbabwe, Representative of His Beatitude in Athens, Elder Metropolitan Paul of Memphis, Metropolitan Seraphim of Johannesburg and Pretoria and His Grace Gabriel, Metropolitan of Mareotis. Present also were Parliamentarians, local officials, the Mayor of East Attica Mr. Kouris, officials of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, family of Father Elia Bertolis and many others.

After the Divine Liturgy His Beatitude conducted a memorial service for the repose of the soul of the late Missionary of Africa, Protopresbyter Elias Bertolis.

His Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki, addressing the Patriarch said among other things: "Your Beatitude, we welcome you today to the little area of Spata together with your elite entourage. We believe that this is a blessed moment, because you are Most Holy because of your status. You bear on your shoulders a great burden of political and ecclesiastical history, as well as an enormous responsibility for a most holy mission".

"When we think that you bear all this history, being a successor of the Apostle Mark, St Athanasios of whom today we commemorate the translation of his relics, St Kyrillos and so many others. When we read history and see that it is condensed into the present through your name and your responsibility, our minds cannot fathom it. We are filled with awe! We see your mission to maintain Hellenism under the present circumstances throughout Africa, and that you are able to give through missionary work the witness of Christ and the Orthodox Church, under exceptionally difficult conditions. We confess therefore that your burden is great, we value it, we appreciate and gratefully meet it face to face at this moment. Yet, we also have something serious, and this is the honour that you give us at this moment, for being here today. We know how extremely busy you are and that you replied positively is huge. Many people come to Spata but up until today no-one as important as you has visited us. We are extremely grateful to you and our hearts praise God. The burdens that you carry, the burden of the honour which we feel, can only be balanced through the Divine Liturgy".

In his reply, His Beatitude said: "My friends, before I came here, coming from Nitria and the Lake of Mareotis, I heard the sighs, the regrets, the tears, the labours, the difficulties of the great fathers. They would come to Alexandria to meet the Pope (the father), they would tell him their worries, their sins, their oversights and the Archbishop of Alexandria, and here I commemorate St John the Almsgiver, would bless them and would ask them to return to the desert. This blessing of Egypt, this land blessed by the tears of the fathers, is what I bring to your blessed Metropolis today, Your Eminence, and to blessed Spata. Your

Eminence Nicholas, it is not the first time I have come to Spata; there was another time, a totally different one, strange and ritualistic. The eve of the Patriarchal elections when I was in Athens for a short while, I took a taxi one night and asked him to take me to Christ, here in Spata. The church was locked as it was late, and across the road I saw a small shrine and in the darkness I knelt, with tears in my eyes and asked Christ in these words: "Sweetest Christ, if you think that I can contribute to this African continent, where I struggled, where I was hungry, thirsty and walked as a missionary, may it be blessed". At that moment, out of the darkness, came an old lady to whom I gave some money and asked her to light a candle for me the next day when the church would be open. The days passed and by the grace of God I was unanimously elected and six years have passed since then. And I was so moved, when in the Throne Room of the Patriarchate in Alexandria after four years, I saw the old lady, who tearfully said to me: "Father, it is me that you gave the money to, to light a candle for you in Spata. I lit the candle and then found out that you had been elected Patriarch and today I have come to get your blessing". So, Your Eminence Nicholas, I am emotionally tied to Spata, because that night when I was alone and a stranger, I felt that Christ of Spata spoke to my heart. I am moved that today I have conducted the memorial service for Fr Elias, because when I was with Patriarch Parthenios, I came to know his children, and his family and the Patriarch would say to me: "Theodore, take a stole and lets go and do a memorial service at the cemetery for Father Elia".

HIS BEATITUDE ON FR. ELIA BERTOLIS

His Beatitude Theodoros II Patriarch of Alexandria speaking of the late Prot. Elias Bertolis, said among other things: "Father Elias Bertolis cannot be forgotten by the Alexandrian Church and the Orthodox faithful whom he served. For our Patriarchate, the memory of this priest who did so much for the Throne, the promotion and progress of the Orthodox Church and for every Greek and African in South Africa, will be eternal. He was faithful and dedicated with all his heart and with all his soul. He loved his service and gave himself to bringing the meaning of the Church in the depths of Africa, because he wanted no-one to miss out on the liturgy, no matter how far he or she lived. He established schools, assisted the establishment and operation of Hellenic communities, did great humanistic work and in one word lived for the love of his fellows wherever they were. Father Elias was always on the go, he worked night and day, concerned always for everything and everyone. His rich ecclesiastical and national effort showed him to be a great personality who was respected and honoured by all Greeks in Southern Africa and elsewhere. So the honours towards the late priest is a duty of the Alexandrian Throne as in his person we honour the struggles and efforts of all our missionaries over time".

His Beatitude then unveiled the bust of the late Priest Elia Bertolis in the grounds of the Metropolitan church of the Dormition of the Theotokos, in Spata. The Alexandrian Primate then visited with His Eminence Nicholas and the former Metropolitan of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki, His Eminence Agathonikos, at his home.