

PATRIARCHAL AND SYNODAL LITURGY IN ALEXANDRIA

On Tuesday 25 November 2014, feast of the Holy Great Martyr and Omniscient Catherine, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa conducted the Festal Patriarchal and Synodal Divine Liturgy at the Holy Patriarchal Church of St Savvas the Sanctified in Alexandria, where the marble column on which the Saint was beheaded is kept, concelebrated by the Hierarchs of the Patriarchate.

Present also at the Eucharistic Gathering were the Honorable Secretary General of the Ministry of Culture Mrs. Mendonis, His Excellency the Ambassador of Greece to Cairo Mr. Ch. Lazaris, the Honorable Consul General of Greece in Alexandria Mr. Ch. Kapodistrias, the distinguished journalist Mrs. A. Panagiotareas, the Educational Attaché of North Africa and the Middle East Mr. P. Kappides, the Honorable Chairman of the Hellenic Community of Alexandria Mr. I. Siokas, Chairmen of Societies and Associations of the Great City and others.

The homily was delivered by His Eminence Damaskinos Metropolitan of Johannesburg and Pretoria and before the end of the Eucharistic Gathering His Beatitude awarded the Patriarchal Office of Lady Treasurer to Mrs. Mendonis in recognition of her long contribution to the promotion of the valuables of Hellenic culture throughout the world. At the same time he awarded Mrs. Panagiotarea the Gold Lion of the Order of the Lion of Alexandria for her genuine perception of the efforts of the Throne of St Mark.

A festive gathering followed in the Throne Room of the Patriarchal Monastery, where His Beatitude received the wishes of his flock, while a festive meal was hosted at the Hellenic Community of Alexandria Club, during which, the Priests of the Patriarchate presented the anniversary Volume on the occasion of the completion of a decade since the election and enthronement of His Beatitude.

On Wednesday and Thursday, 26 and 27 November 2014 respectively, the Holy Synod of the Hierarchs of the Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa will convene, chaired by His Beatitude Pope and Patriarch Theodoros II, and will concern itself with pastoral, administrative and all manner of current issues.

Homily by His Eminence Damaskinos Metropolitan of Johannesburg and Pretoria during the Divine Liturgy:

Your Beatitude Father and Master,

Our Holy Church, as the Body of Christ and a community of theosis, reveals to the world the Kingdom of God. Time in history becomes the place where every faithful person in Christ, through the Church and with the grace of the Holy Spirit can be enrolled in eternity.

Every day we see in the feasts the figure of one or many together of the Saints of our Faith, to be emulated, for instruction, for the support of the members of the Church militant, of all of us in other words. And they are jubilantly honoured, showing at the same time their love for and faith in Jesus Christ, throughout their lives and their efforts to be united with Him. Others of these through spiritual and ascetical struggles achieved this, others again through painful and terrible martyrdom confessing before the ungodly and the unfaithful, also achieved this.

However, everywhere and always, it is martyrdom and witness of Christ, our Saviour. A prominent place of honour on the iconostasis of those Saints celebrated is held by the Great Martyr Catherine who is commemorated today, who was born and brought up in Alexandria in the 4th century B.C.

She was of royal descent. She was also very beautiful. She was most educated – despite being only 20 years of age. She had studied and indulged in philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy, classical education and was adept in many languages and dialects. Above all she had come to love and believe in Jesus Christ and had dedicated her life to Him. In short, she was a Christian.

The times of Diocletian, Maximian and Maximin, were hard. The persecutions against

those who followed the Lord, believing in His salvific work, were ruthless and great.

Indeed, Maximin, on learning of her great wisdom and eloquence, as well as of her beauty and wanting to humiliate her, invited fifty wise men of those times, the best in Alexandria, aiming at silencing Catherine and showing that her faith was false and her spiritual struggles in the name of the Nazarene were futile.

The result was that the Saint eloquently crushed all those impious ones of their wisdom – “the eloquence of the impious by the sword of the spirit”, in fact proving to them the accuracy of the expected Jesus Christ through the writings of the oracles and the wise men of the era before Christ.

She used the prophecies of Sybil and of Apollo, who clearly spoke of an expected someone, who would save the divided world.

Amazed at the wisdom of this most beautiful young girl, especially by her faith and boldness, the wise men abandoned their convictions which till that point were erroneous and became Christians.

This resulted in their being put to death by the Prefect of Alexandria and the Saint was put to terrible torture patiently to be martyred for her steadfast faith in the Lord.

Her blood was again spilt on the Land of the Nile and her example is shown by our Orthodox Church to all of us as another Alexandrian lighthouse which lights the way for the coming generations in their struggle for the spreading of the Gospel of HIM who became the first Great Martyr and Saviour of mankind.

It appears and shows the way for the mission of our Church, which is definitely not easy and which presupposes all those elements which St Catherine possessed.

Love for and faith in God was her strength. This was her witness. This brought her to martyrdom. “Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone it falls on” (Matthew 21:44).

Today my friends, we have convened from the ends of the vast African continent, all the Bishops of the Second Throne Patriarchate of Alexandria surrounding our Pope and Patriarch and we have offered the Bloodless Sacrifice to our Lord and God. Clergy and laity of God. All together we beseech Him for peace and stability in the whole world.

For health and length of days for His Beatitude our Father Pope and Patriarch THEODOROS II of Alexandria and All Africa. Rejoicing and priding ourselves together with him on the completion of a decade since his elevation to the Alexandrian Throne.

As his Bishop and not wanting to offend him, I will say a few words about great works. A few words from the heart for a great figure of our time, who has been internationally honoured and about whom many praises have been given by many. He has been awarded countless honours and great medals and he has received noble titles.

Therefore, what would I add if I numbered all these today? Perhaps I would disappoint my Patriarch and would create negative thoughts about myself.

No, I will not speak about all these which are common knowledge. I will offer a few words from my heart for the man Theodoros, Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa. The man, without the sonorous titles of his repute and the brilliant Patriarchal vestments and tiara, using his own thoughts from his own homilies through the years.

The man with the simple cassock of the missionary on the dark continent, the man with the muddy shoes and the dusty cassock, as I saw him with my own eyes, running through the savannahs of this vast continent, with fire in his soul, tirelessly trying to pass on the word of the Gospel to the pure white souls of the people with black skins.

I witnessed him disregard all the elements of nature and the dangers to go ahead and make the most of the light of day. To see, to hear, to say and then to preach

the God of love.

But you cannot preach this God if within you, you have not first fought to have love. Love for Him, love for his every creature. "Ministering to all in Africa all these years, I learned that if people can be taught hatred, they can more easily be taught to love. And this is because God instilled love in our hearts at the dawn of the historic journey of mankind", he said in one of his homilies.

To hurt and to bleed with whatever exploitation of humans, so that your heart is torn by the results of this exploitation and the human evil, which has no emotions and counts no-one as a person, a person of God. To watch the newly-illuminated with amputated arms and paralyzed legs, resulting from civil strife and interests in the riches underground of certain countries and to try to find the hidden diamond in their souls. That for which "Christ suffered for us". Suffering and war severely stained with blood the precious stones which are hidden underground and scattered destruction everywhere. It forever stigmatized the innocent human souls which bore the burden and which in the end had no share in the allocation.

Your Beatitude, some of these you encountered with me when with your blessing I served in West Africa and you encounter them daily, whenever you visit countries in your jurisdiction. And you try discreetly to overcome the pain and to bring hope to these people showing them that they are children of the same God as us,, of the God of Love, Justice, Peace.

Your journey continues tirelessly. Tirelessly and always on the go, as usual, you wander over your beloved Africa and meet the Presidents of countries. With simplicity and passion you speak about the Orthodox Church, our ancient Patriarchate, your plans and programmes which you set up and realize, with God's help. Always for the good of the suffering flock. Always with love for people as an image of God. Always to the glory of God.

"We do not wish to be recorded in history as the ideologist, the acknowledge one, or the charismatic one. However, we wish to be recorded in your hearts as the true Father, who knows how to love and only to love, with as much effort, pain and sacrifice is needed for this", is what you said in Harare, Zimbabwe on the occasion of your completion of seven years as Patriarch in 2011.

And with you, as fellow travelers, we watch and experience. And we learn. I do not think that we could learn these things anywhere else. I do not think that any faculty exists which can classify these things in its cycle of lessons.

They are life experiences, stages of life, ways of life, missionary ways full of thorns of all kinds which you and we are called on to pass through. "Speaking of missionary work in the endless stretches of Africa, we speak essentially of sacrificial love. It is all about a work of witness, a witness of Christ, a total dedication without a middle path". These are also your words, which show the majesty of your loving heart and your total dedication to the missionary effort of the evangelization of the nations.

You have loved and you love every person without singling out any of their qualities. You love every poor person of God in Africa.

"Even though I have served in Africa for many years, the African fellow humans have never ceased to amaze me, every time that missionary work, as solidarity with and participation in love, brings me into communion with them. They amaze me and their example of life, thought, word, fill me".

You work for their dignity, for their respect, for their life, which unfortunately has no value in the stock market values of this age.

The great Nelson Mandela, when he met you in South Africa and spoke with you, said this with certainty: "Now I have a friend who will be able to talk to the angels about me to take me to Paradise". Certainly, this great fighter for freedom, equality, justice, ascertained that in your mind and heart too, these values move your life and your steps.

Whoever meets you is disarmed by your unpretentious kindness, your simplicity, as

well as your decisiveness on whatever is beneficial in the service to our fellow humans.

"We thank you for coming to suffer with us", a tribal leader in North Cameroon said to you in February 2009 during your visit there. And this is perhaps the greatest thanks which you have received during your sacrificial decade as Patriarch. This thank you gives you strength to continue your journey of Love for man.

That is why we boast in celebrating today, all of us thanking God for your decade as Patriarch, as well as for the 60th anniversary of your birth.

Our pride is our Patriarch.

Our example is his love.

Our aim is serving our fellow humans.

Many years Your Beatitude Father and Master.

May we celebrate many more decades with you, filled with works of love and contribution.